This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

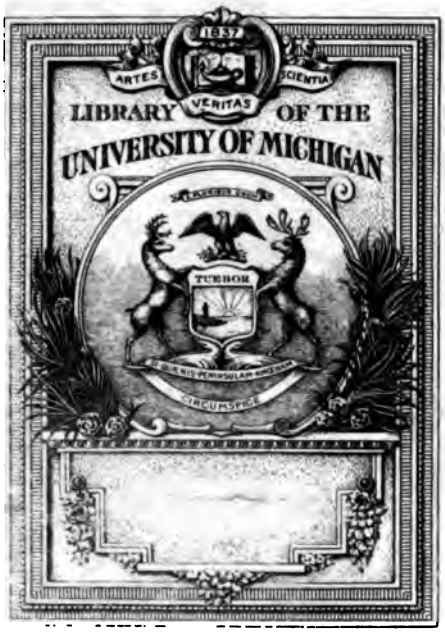
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

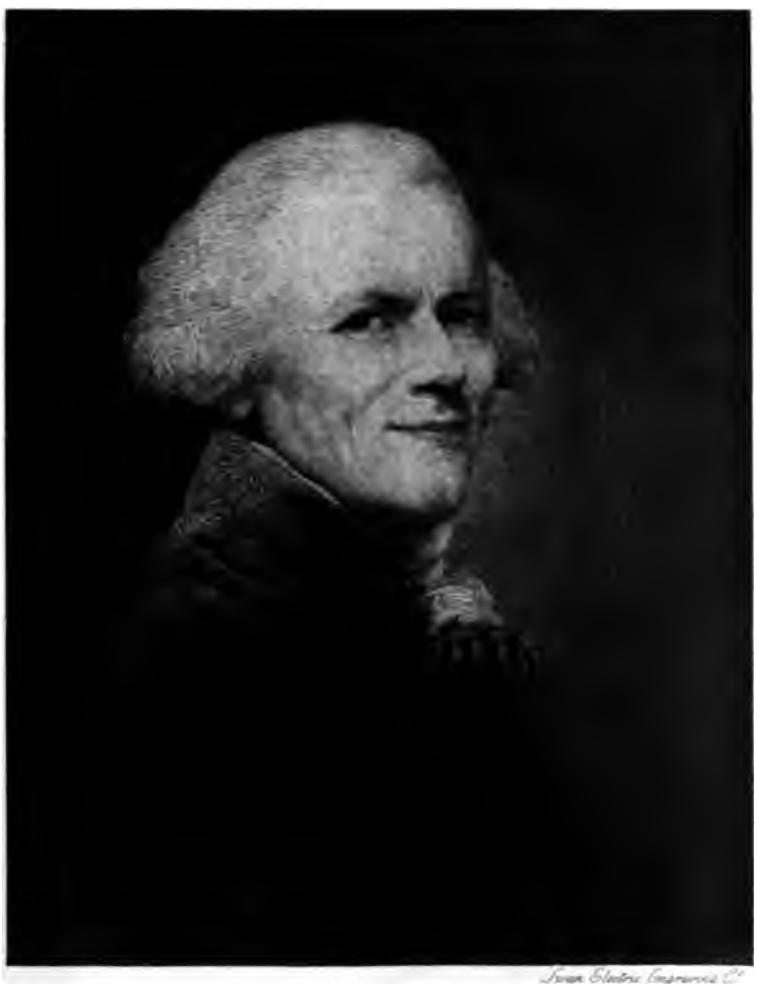
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

B 1,287,827


1837
ARTES
SCIENTIA
VERITAS
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
TUEBOR
CIRCUMSPICE

# ROBESPIERRE

UNIV. OF MICH.



*Robespierre*

*From a reputed portrait by Greuze in the possession of the Earl of Rosebery*

UNIV. OF MICH.

# ROBESPIERRE

## A STUDY

BY

HILAIRE BELLOC, B.A.

AUTHOR OF "DANTON," ETC.

New York

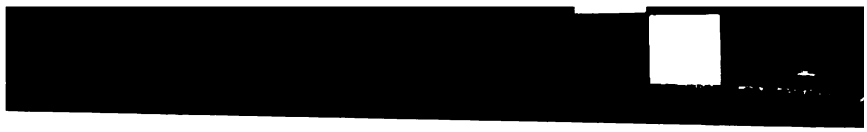
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1901

THE CAXTON PRESS
NEW YORK.

TO THE

*LORD BASIL TEMPLE BLACKWOOD*



Hist-Europ.
Nat Bib
9-8-26
13743

# PREFACE

VERY often I have sat alone at evening before a fire of logs in a room near the Rue St. Honoré, and tried to call up for myself the great men who from that air challenged necessity, and, within the screen of their armies, created the modern world.

There surrounded me upon such occasions the furniture of their epoch. My eyes rested upon details that were not only in the tradition of the Revolution, but were often used and admired when the Convention was sitting; and all about me, in the severe taste of the French bourgeoisie and in the paucity of ornament that accompanies a certain austere carelessness for fortune, was the atmosphere of those lives to which my thoughts continually turned. The medium in which I attempted to evoke their shadows was their own and was in a fashion my inheritance. About me and in my ears was the clear and sounding life of Paris, nor was my imagination disturbed by any recent memories of privilege, by the sophistries of the modern rich, or by the jargon of the evanescent and false philosophies by whose aid the academies attempt to escape from the traditions of Europe. I was so situated that the justice and endurance of the Republic were as evident as material things, and I knew without any doubt that the stoical temper was, in the fine phrase of a contemporary, the permanent religion of humanity.

My solitude was not unvisited. It was possible in such a place and with such memories to move in a great company, to hear in the streets the rumble of the guns, and to see the high palaces of the city full of the people

conquering. I well imagined Condorcet, that had the strength to write, in the extremes of his poverty and hiding, so noble a defence of his creed; I could raise up the beauty of St. Just, the indefatigable concentration of Carnot, stretched out on the floor of the committee, poring with candles over the large maps of the defence. There, also, distinct and living beyond the rest, I could summon the great figure of Danton, and his good-fellowship, and his soul that always recalled the Marne and that, when it was close to death, could not help remembering the pleasant country beside Aube. I had some communion with the Girondins; the gravity of Vergniaud, the fire of Barbaroux, the sombre anger of Isnard. Across these scenes I could follow Marat, that was never himself, and that carried a mad torch without sequel, but just avoiding catastrophe. There also were the armies, the volunteers thrown out in streams from the gates, the return of '95. Or from the trenches the heavy buildings of Charleroi would stand against a June dawn, with the high, bare land of Fleurus over them, and La Diane, the bugle-call, waking the young men out of the trenches to the battle.

Yet these still moved like clouds, unstable, and I found at last this insufficiency attaching to such reveries, that their images would remain insecure, and that the mind arose from them unsatisfied, since they lacked stuff and avoided any certain gaze. Had such a dreaming reposed upon mere fancies, it would have been proper food for poetry or for fiction, but the deeds and the men whose story proved so great that it could thus rise from the dead were true. The lives had been lived and the things done. Then it was not possible to rest content in the shadows; it became necessary to fill out the whole truth, and since one was already certain of the idea in which all these things were contained, it became a business to explore their reality.

For this there was no refuge but history, and hence it became at first a labour, but at last a delight, to build them up from innumerable details, and to make of what had been fugitive, if grandiose, imaginaries, certain and well-guarded possessions.

In this task a great deal is for the moment sacrificed; the high pleasure of mingling with a greater past will not, any more than music will, permit without injury to itself the contact of industry. The dissonance of varying judgments, the domestic incidents of heroes, the comic and the grotesque which our little minds reject for the sake of the unities but which Nature never leaves unmixed with her epics—all these disturb and harden. Records divorced from critical appreciation, or falsified all out of tune with each other, mere praise, mere blame, mere numbers bewilder the mind. It is as though our parts were not intended to grasp the numberless impressions upon whose integration historical truth reposes.

Nevertheless, the sacrifice repays. It is like the growing of slow timber upon a sheltered hill; you seem to have established an enduring thing. There stand out at last a vigour and a plenitude that are to the unsubstantial origins of such a search what touch, sight, and hearing are to memory. Then, when reality is reached, it is easy to be sure; and when so much doubt and contradiction are resolved into a united history, the continual admission, for the sake of exactitude, of what is petty, sordid or fatiguing does but make more human, and therefore more certainly true, what had before been lyrics or idols.

Now, there are attached to this method of approaching history two features which require an apology. In the attempt to fix exactly an historic figure, it is necessary first to make the physical environment reappear. In the great phrase of Michelet such history must be "a resur-

rection," and there is no resurrection without the resurrection of the flesh. In the second place, it is necessary to admit laborious and dusty discussion, not only of disputed events, but of the inner workings of a mind. It is the attempt to achieve either of these ends that gives such history as that which I have attempted its burden of endeavour. It is the attempt to unite the two which lends also to such a book a necessary, but inartistic incongruity. I could not illustrate that burden and that incongruity better than by referring to the very subject of the pages that follow.

Nothing would be easier than to make a drama of the life of Robespierre, were one content to neglect the exactitude of historical record. On the other hand, nothing would be easier—seeing the enormous amount of material that has been accumulated with regard to him, the mass of his written work, and the great host of witnesses that have left their impression of him for posterity—than to write down a voluminous chronicle in which the self-contradictions should be stated, but not explained, and in which all the sequence of the great story and all its poignancy should be neglected. I say either of these, the drama or the chronicle, would follow a straight road. But when it comes to the combination of both, there is imposed a task in which perfection is impossible, and whose fulfilment I know will certainly not be found in this book. Yet such a combination is the first duty of history.

Let me take an instance, one out of a hundred, of what I mean. In the last seven weeks of the Terror, when that system had, as it were, passed into frenzy, Robespierre was regarded universally as its author and king. There must be some foundation for a tradition which all contemporaries, domestic and foreign, unquestioningly accepted. Nothing could be easier and nothing would more satisfy the sense of the dramatic in history

than to present him as the guilty conceiver of an enormous crime, and to make Thermidor the retribution. Turn to the documents of these seven weeks and you will discover that he would not sign the lists of the condemned, that he protested against nearly all the more famous of the prosecutions, and that the body directly responsible for them, the Committee of Public Safety, regarded him as a danger; more, you will find that the spokesman of that body says that Robespierre perished "because he attempted to put a curb on the Revolution"; and you will find that those who chiefly overthrew him were men determined to push the Terror to a further extreme. What is to be made of such a contradiction? In fiction such a crux can never arise; in history, and especially in the history of this man, such paradoxes are the ordinary material of the story, and one may not so correct and omit as to lend the whole an artificial simplicity. It is even necessary, in presenting one single figure, not only to admit every record, however contradictory, but to analyse, to discuss, and at the risk of great tedium, to bolt out the best reading of that hidden spring of the mind.

So much for what is wearisome in the life of Robespierre. It is the more wearisome because he had but one theme, because he could speak of nothing but of that theme and of himself, the voice of it, and because the intricate problem of his rise stands contrasted with the plain and terrible scenes whose interest for us to-day is still that of an armed combat to men watching from the heights.

And if the necessity of discussion threatens tedium, the attempt to recover physical details may introduce another danger: it may make the history seem doubtful. It will be discovered by my reader that continually throughout the following pages I have introduced that kind of description which is expected rather in the evidence

of an eye-witness or in the creations of fiction. I know that such an attempt at vivid presentation carries with it a certain suspicion when it is applied to history; I can only assure my readers that the details I have admitted can be proved true from the witness of contemporaries or from the inference which their descriptions and the public records of the time permit one to draw. I have but rarely illustrated the sources from which they are derived, because if this method were made to depend upon foot-notes there would be no reading of the book.

A single instance of the way in which a scene may be built up must suffice to excuse their absence; take the impression, in the ninth chapter, of the Committee of Public Safety on the night between the 8th and 9th Thermidor, and of the dawn coming into the room. There are a few accounts of it remaining in somewhat contradictory memoirs, but there is no exact contemporary description of that scene. How am I certain that my own description is true? Because there remains at the observatory in Paris a record of the sultry, overcast weather of that morning, and of the increasing heat and distant thunder of the day; because Mercier has given us the details and the situation of the room; because many men still living have been able to describe to me the aspect of the two great halls in the Pavillon de Flore; because one may check upon the map the road that Collot and Billaud must have followed from the Jacobins to the great staircase of the Tuilleries; because we have a record of the exact time when St. Just rose to leave, and one can estimate how far the daylight was advanced. I could quote fifty places in that one page which would each demand a footnote to show from whence were drawn the threads of which the whole is woven. But I know that the method requires an apology and I have therefore presented it in these few lines.

Finally, I owe it to my readers to disclaim research.

The work that remains to be done with regard to Robespierre does not lie in the discovery of new documents; there are too many already, and those that would have told us most were burnt by Courtois. I say that it is impossible to add seriously to the collection of facts which M. Hamel made in the course of something like a lifetime more than thirty years ago. It is a record containing nothing but facts, each one substantiated and every document quoted, and it is nearer 2000 than 1000 pages long. The work which remains to be done upon Robespierre is the explanation of him. There are the facts in a vast accumulation. They contradict each other; they present a problem not only of the greatest intellectual interest, but of some considerable moment to those who would comprehend the nature and the origin of our modern politics. To arrive at the sharp truth with regard to this man, who, at the Renaissance of European democracy, was made for a few months a kind of god, is to understand perhaps the problem which the immediate future presents to us, and even if it does not do this, the solution may help us to understand the Revolution in which our modern theory began.

To explain that man imperfectly is all I have attempted. It has been so difficult that (with the exception of a slight essay upon the town of Paris) it has provided the occupation of two years. Now that the work is over I could almost wish that instead of wandering in such a desert it had been my task to follow St. Just and the wars, and to revive the memories of forgotten valour.

# CONTENTS


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| | PREFACE | vii |
| I. | THE PERSON AND CHARACTER OF ROBESPIERRE | 1 |
| II. | THE DESCENT AND YOUTH OF ROBESPIERRE | 39 |
| III. | VERSAILLES | 69 |
| IV. | PARIS | 103 |
| V. | THE WAR | 146 |
| VI. | ROBESPIERRE AND PARIS | 193 |
| VII. | THE FALL OF THE GIRONDE | 233 |
| VIII. | THE TEMPTATION OF ROBESPIERRE | 269 |
| IX. | THE FOUR MONTHS —— | 297 |
| X. | "THERMIDOR" | 331 |


## NOTES


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I. | ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE "MEMOIRS OF CHARLOTTE ROBESPIERRE" | 368 |
| II. | ON CERTAIN SITES MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK | 375 |
| III. | ROBESPIERRE'S SUPPOSED ATTEMPT AT SUICIDE | 377 |

# ROBESPIERRE

## CHAPTER I

### THE PERSON AND CHARACTER OF ROBESPIERRE

In presenting the story of Robespierre this must be attempted at the outset as a key to the whole: the picture of himself. A man of insufficient capacity, bent into the narrowest gauge, tenacious of all that statesmen least comprehend, and wholly ignorant even of the elements of their science, became for a brief time the personification of a vast national movement of which he was but barely in sympathy with one single aspect, and that the least inspiring and the least fruitful. How did such a position come to him, and why did it remain even for those few months? This same man, singularly ill-fitted to his country, to its traditions and its native humour, to its colour, religion, and every essential, fell suddenly from power by no general rising of opinion, by no discovery of discord between himself and those who had worshipped him. He fell by a kind of mighty triviality; a small chance of intrigue and conspiracy that yet carried in itself much of the fate of our civilisation. How is such a fall to be explained?

The secret of his eminence and of his extinction lies in himself. The men, the circumstances that surrounded him are well known. The environment of his

personality has been fully studied. Every attempt to solve the problem of his career from these data has failed; every such attempt has but resulted in the delineation of a caricature, or in the evocation of mere phantasy. The causes of that supreme elevation and that immediate fall do not lie, as they do with the vast majority of such historical accidents, in the pressure of surrounding things; they must be sought from within. The problem cannot be approached from the standpoint of that fierce and open youth which was recasting Europe; the youth from which his concealed activities so strangely differed, and which will always be as clear and plain as the good daylight. You can solve it only by standing where his own soul stood, looking out with his own pale eyes to see the bodiless world stretched on one unsupported truth, and feeling in yourself, as you read, that proximity of fixed conviction to organic weakness, which he knew to be his compound, and which determined the whole of his life.

The unravelling of his motives, the establishment of his relation to the great movement with which he is sometimes erroneously identified, the exact fixing of his proportions and capacities are not idle speculations. So to present the real man has this double purpose, each part of which is full of value: it helps to explain the growth and character of symbolic figures in general; it presents from a special standpoint the various web of the Revolution in particular. A life of Robespierre should show of what stuff are made those single-thoughted, narrow exponents of a wide enthusiasm round whom the legends gather, and who tend to stand in history as embodied principles, losing their real selves in the effect of time—and in a life of Robespierre there should also be apparent that comedy wherein lies the artistic interest of the great story of France and Europe.

The first of these objects, the use of this life as the type of so many others, must be left for my book itself to develop; the second, the dramatic value of his career, needs a longer apology.

The combination of unexpected accidents, the failure of set plans, the perverse results of fate, the incongruous rôles thrust suddenly upon ill-chosen men, the pressure of unseen forces to which society suddenly responds, the entry of heroes, and the birth of songs, all these make up in history a tapestry of connected scenes to which finality alone is lacking, nor is there absent any dramatic element that should satisfy the mind saving only purpose. Now the best medium through which that ceaseless flow of action may be viewed is the life of a devotee.

The noble, sane, and generous leaders of mankind lend a false unity to their world and make us partisans as we read. The picture of a general period does but reflect in one phase or another the general life of mankind, and, as from a superior height, reduces to a normal level the accidents of personality. But the mind of the enthusiast, especially if he be dried up by the heat of his conviction, affords every needed contrast, and one appreciates from a low level and in a slanting light the high relief of history. For thence you may watch the insufficiency of a man to his part, the rude horseplay of environment, the expected that fails to arrive—all the embroglio. You see the lining of the shield and know what kind of thing is at the core of that which various trappings turn into a high priest or a king. You perceive not only the mechanism of the idol itself, but also that thirst for the ideal which creates idolatry, and by a long acquaintance with the inner life of one that shall succeed and fail in a moment of intense public activity, there is half-resolved at last that prime contradiction of political society, whereby enthusiasm, breeding

as it does the most violent ill-judgment, the worst deeds and the widest deviation from truth and from reality, is yet seen to be commingled with that permanent appreciation of justice which is at once the divinest and the most perilous attribute of the soul.

Robespierre would have stood much more securely in history were he merely of that kind who, in the passionate quest for a final state, or in an immediate attempt to remedy injustice, come out in the open to ruin the conventions and to remodel the permanent framework of society. He would not have afforded the problem which it is the matter of this book to examine if he could be set down at once in the run of the reformers, nor is a thorough knowledge of his life of value because it shows the ordinary type of those who lead or perfect great movements. It is precisely because the phenomenon of his immense popularity and brief hold of power is special and peculiar that the study of him becomes an appreciation of what makes in human history for the high growths of fierce religions and for the persistent following of symbolic figures. It is as an original that he takes the stage.

There are men upon whom the pretensions of wealth and the self-created values of rank work as an irritant corrosive; they feel the primary dignity of man to be insulted by such fables, but they feel the insult especially as directed against themselves, and in their attempt to avenge it they lose proportion, calling in all evils angrily to remedy this one. He was not of these.

There are others in whom the material suffering of the oppressed raises so generous an indignation that they are willing to pay the penalties of exaggeration and of a kind of frenzy, so only they may see righted the gross wrong that forbids human bread to the poor. He was not of these.

There are others again who, with the experience of

an enslaved nationality, and of its consequence in the enslavement of the human will, pursue with ardour for years, by every means, the independence of their country, an ideal which, under such conditions, is one with that of individual freedom. To such, patience and a practical mind are commonly granted, and they ultimately achieve success by force of arms. He was not of these.

There are others, far less blessed, in whom the manifest iniquities of living breed a furious hatred of their kind. Yet in them also there burns something of the divine, and because it is by evil that their anger is aroused, they also reveal God. He was not of these.

There are yet others in whom the fine rage for a normal polity and for equal law, rises at the close of some corrupt time and turns them creative; from these proceed, as by an outburst of organic life, new and vigorous institutions that preserve the State for generations from decay. In the company of the Revolution, which could boast, as it were, an army of such men, he yet could not count himself of that kind.

He was divorced from all those spirits who, in whatever form the reaction towards simplicity may possess them, are united by a common inspiration, and are occupied and driven by the afflatus of some genius; instruments of an outer power. What, then, was his place among the Revolutionaries whose doctrines waken, whose tenacity disturbs, but whose efforts, rising from a memory of original right, can therefore remould mankind? That he is to be reckoned among those who thus make starting-points in history no one will take it upon his conscience to deny, and unless we admit the common error by which he is nothing but a void, an emptiness defined by a mass of negatives, it is necessary to see the man himself, and, so far as the distance of time will permit it, to cause him to appear.

It is wisest, in attempting the resurrection of a man, to follow the natural order of observation and to see him physically as all could see him in his time, before one seeks out the remote springs of his action, or approaches an analysis of his temper.

In height Robespierre was a little below the medium, but this feature, which would not in itself convey an impression of insignificance, went with a certain slightness of build that left him unnoticed unless, by the accident of the tribune, he were withdrawn from the crowd. His frame was of a delicate mould, his hands and feet small and well-shaped, his chest neither broad nor deep. He had not that vitality of action which proceeds from well-furnished lungs; neither the voice nor the gesture, the good-humour, nor the sudden powers that belong to men whose fires have draught to them. Indeed his complexion, though clear, was of that pale cast which we often associate with a kind of morbidity, and he was throughout his youth and public life affected with the frequent approach, though never with the continuance, of ill-health. The recollection of this pallor and of the delicacy of his skin gave rise (when his living presence was no longer there to correct the error) to an impression of sourness and nervous bile which has vitiated most historical descriptions; for, as will be seen in much that follows, his temper was even beyond the common, his smile, though cold, was frequent, and his patience firm.

He had, in common with the whole of that French professional class from which he sprang, a pronounced habit of order, a regularity of demeanour, and a very remarkable capacity for prolonged mental work; but this last so tended to expend itself upon imaginaries and perpetual deductions that he lost the sustenance which it afforded in countless other cases to the more practical minds of the Revolution; nor did it produce in him that reaction towards common things which was so marked in Carnot,

and which had at the end begun to appear in St. Just. This appetite for arrangement evoked in his mind a character which must be mentioned later; in his outer life it gave him the neatness of dress which has so often been justly insisted upon by the historians of the Revolution. He pushed to some excess an amiable vice whereby the care of the person was made the special social duty of the old régime, and is still preserved in exaggerated reverence by the social class of which he formed a member. Moderate as was his expenditure at every period of his life, he found the means for a careful wardrobe, and devoted a regular portion of his time to its maintenance. In the variety of colours which the age permitted he chose such as were best suited to his type and presence, and, partly from a desire to avoid exaggeration, partly from taste, he preferred the sober colours of the contemporary fashion of his rank, a warm brown or olive green for the colour of his coat. Later he ventured upon the brighter colours of '93, and especially upon a favourite light blue, which the accident of two dates has rendered famous. In the careful elegance of his silk stockings, in the buckles which, even after the change of fashion in 1792, he continued to wear upon his shoes, in his white stock and small lace wristbands, he displayed at every point the general taste of his society, but that heightened by a far more scrupulous attention and a somewhat greater choice than his neighbours could show. It is evident that with such a taste he would observe to a detail the conventions of the age in his barbering. His brown hair, carefully brushed back and standing fully outwards, was powdered with exact and daily regularity, and it is related of him that in all the vigils and alarms of the last years, even when those street battles joined up whole days and made men forget sleeping and waking, he was never seen unshaven till the awful watch that ended his life.

Such habits were necessarily accompanied by an erect figure, by a rapid though not decided step, and by a certain slight vivacity in the movements of the head, though he dealt as rarely as any other northerner in the language of gesture, being restrained in every attitude and careful to preserve his poise.

When you came to look at his face there was apparent a peculiar character which engravers and sculptors greatly exaggerated after his death, but which a study of contemporary painting reduces to juster proportions; it consisted in the prominence of the facial bones and a lack of softness in the contours. This meagre hardness produced no very striking or violent effect, but it was sufficiently emphatic to place him, when we call up the great gallery which the Revolution affords, in the group of over-keen, sharp-featured portraits wherein are found also Sieyès, Jean-Bon, Camus, Couthon, and many other dissimilar men united only in a common appearance of emphasis and precision.

Such effects as this accident of leanness produced in his expression were heightened by details that often accompany its presence. Thus the cheek-bones were high and formed the broadest part of his face. His nose was short, delicate and quite without an arch, his lips compressed and thin; and there was an insufficient development of the jaw accompanied by a sharpness of the chin, which, when his little constant smile was absent, lent a somewhat false appearance of bitterness to his appearance. The upper part of his face, that the hollowness of his cheeks thus threw into relief, was remarkable for a feature which the hair-dress of the eighteenth century tended indeed to exaggerate, but which yet was common to half the public men of the time; I mean the broad, high and retreating forehead which seems to promise grasp and rapid reason, but which ignores the mysteries and is unacquainted with

doubt. You may find it in every profile of all the Bourbons, of Diderot, of Voltaire and even of Mirabeau. For the rest his head was regular though somewhat small, and such impressions as it might afford of intellectual power, or rather alacrity, were increased by an upward holding of it common to men of his inferior stature. His words thus reached the whole of an assembly, and the direction of his gaze, which was commonly above the horizon, added to his carriage an air of confidence that was hardly in keeping with the attitude of his mind.

His eyes, whence most his self pierced outward, gave immediate evidence of the homogeneity, sincerity and circumscription as they did also of the half-unquiet of his mind and of its unfittedness for reception. For the slight prominence of their brows made them seem deeper set and closer together than they really were, but this gave no special effect of energy or profundity since their colour and a physical weakness in their action modified or destroyed their impression. They were peculiarly pale and of a neutral greenish grey, not without light but quite bereft of brilliance; so far from possessing that command which is common to the vision of those who control parliaments, a nervous weakness that caused a recurrent trembling in their lids compelled him to the use of spectacles when he was at work or when (as was his universal habit) he read his speeches. The expression of these eyes of his was not unkindly, and it accentuated the slight, smiling tension which was the common contour of his lips; but an over-rapid glance that seemed to watch upon every occasion, gave evidence of what became in circumstances of danger an unbalancing habit of suspicion. Then, too, he would often raise his forehead in wrinkles when he spoke and play a little with his fingers. These nervous faults that took away so much from his physical capacity for dominion were repeated also in certain slight

movements of the lower face that gained upon him in moments of irritation or of concentrated attention; as though the slight tremor from which his eyes suffered provoked a sympathetic action in the facial muscles of the jaw.

But it would be very ridiculous to make of these symptoms a principal matter in the picture of Robespierre. They were generally absent from his later, as they were entirely from his earlier life, and they serve but as indications of the manner in which his temperament was affected by an extreme success and a corresponding danger, for either of which it was utterly unsuited. In evidence of this it may be noted that his face was free from the lines which constant anxiety or ceaseless assiduity drew upon those of his contemporaries, nor had he any marked development of such indications of character, save in the furrows that flank the mouth and that stand commonly for some perception of irony and for a habit of self-control.

I will believe that his voice though somewhat weak and possessing no wide range, yet had a power of very varied modulation, was sympathetic and clear. It was pitched to such a tenor that in the silence generally accorded to him it reached with exact articulation to the furthest recesses of the galleries in the Menus Plaisirs, or even in the vast oval of the Manège. But whenever a hubbub arose he was quite unable to meet it, and would either endure till it had passed or succumb to it as to a physical oppression. In the open air, when there were no walls to make a sounding-board, he could hardly be heard. In all this he differed widely from those whom he supplanted, from Mirabeau and Danton, whose deep, loud voices could fill an open arena, and in any closed and violent debate could sound like large bells above a gale. If there was any other thing to help the success of his oratory beside the clarity of articulation and the

pitch to which I have alluded, it lay in the reputation that a small surrounding of friends had made for his manner; a reputation inherited from his half-literary youth in college and at Arras, where it is indubitable that he had exercised a permanent if exiguous charm, and one that Carnot, Le Bas, Desmoulins or the Roberts would certainly remember.

Such in general, then, is the picture one must take with one in following his adventure and tragedy. A figure slight but erect and sufficiently well filled, a little dainty and always exquisitely fitted, not disdainful of colour but contemptuous of ornament, he maintained to the end those externals which had been the enamel of the old society; shaming, astonishing or irking the sick slipshod of a Marat, the casual rough negligence of a Danton, the dust of maps and floors that soiled a sleepless Carnot, the common tongue of a Hébert or the guard-room coarseness of a Hanriot. We must see his small, set and pointed, but open and somewhat lifted face developing in the course of a stress for which he was not made and which a nascent ambition could alone compel him to suffer, some growing nervousness of manner. His pale complexion upon whose temples and forehead the veins would show, his blonde, grey-green, short-sighted, luminous but weakening eyes, his lips compressed and thin, but often set to an expression of advance or attention, his large retreating forehead, his reserve of gesture —all these form the expression of which a voice somewhat high and tenuous but not without attraction was the organ.

He passes up the Revolution as in his physical gait he passed up the gangway of the parliament: rapidly, but not over decidedly; lacking, apparently, the power of controlling others, but with the constancy of attitude that proceeds from strict limitations and with a singular fixity of carriage. A man, with all this, absorbed in the

effort after form, possessed of a considerable literary ambition, pale, insufficient, exact, laborious, he does not seem much more than the successful and locally prominent county lawyer, a trifle pedantic but enjoying a sound connection of justly admiring and somewhat unimpressive friends; one that, entering politics, might draft or criticise, but that could hardly attract a general observation.

This he should have been, and such things he should have done. What did he?

He held first a group, then a great political machine, then a sovereign assembly, and at last a nation, attentive. He became the title and front of the republic: the kings regarded him; he put some fear into the priests; the armies converged upon his tenement; the general run of European society stood aghast at his supposed enormities; the most generous, the most practical, and the most violent of the great Reformers alike insisted upon his bearing their standard; he may become for the martyrs and prophets of complete democracy an idol, as he has already become their legend. Whence did this astonishing contrast between his native, probable career and his actual fate proceed? It proceeded from the fact that his character contained a something which the special nature of the time craved, which it insisted upon and would not abandon. That something was but one factor of his whole temperament, it might have lain dormant though it could never have been atrophied, but certainly it would have suffered neglect in ordinary times, and with that neglect he would himself, in ordinary times, have remained contented.

To discover this hidden and permanent part of him which the Revolution deified, it is necessary to examine what inner temper accompanied or gave rise to the externals I have described, and such a task I shall now undertake: to show the mind that made this body.

The character of Robespierre is contained in these

two connected facts: First, that he was a man of the old régime—divining nothing outside of it, undisturbed by that germinating of the future which worked in and troubled the great minds around him, and threw an energy of travail into their splendid tragedy; secondly, that he had to an inhuman, or (if the word be preferred) to an heroic, degree the potentiality of intense conviction; for God had given him a kind of stone tabernacle within the soul where he could treasure absolute truths and this tabernacle remained impregnable.

Of these two qualities I would speak in their order.

It was uniquely because Robespierre was a man of the old régime that he received so unquestioningly the philosophy which that world produced for its own destruction, and his strict confinement to this society it was that made him so universally accepted as the leader of its exodus. Men full of the time to come suffered from the suspicion that attaches to whatever is strange; Danton was too much inspired by the future realities, the creations of the revolution; the Girondins were too much up in the light outside their time and their world. But for Robespierre every trick that wearies us now, every detail which we reject as faded in colour or stilted in design, was part of a political fortune. His long classical allusions, his well-apportioned phrases, the symbolism that seems tinsel to us now, were the very air of that time; it was thought a sound mark in a man that he should unconsciously accept such habits always. They were to his generation what wordy compromises, the allusive style, the pretence of knowledge, and the jargon of science are to ours;—things which a man rejects to his interior and lasting good, but to his immediate hurt; things which make easy and successful the lives of those who do not perceive or who are content to forget their triviality. Of such advantage is it never to have passed the gates of one city.

It is a necessity proceeding from the very nature of change that each period of a definite colour and temper, while making an ideal perhaps of things long past, despises the epoch immediately preceding it. So the fifth century saw nothing but vileness in the sunset of the gods, drew up a baleful legend to condemn the memory of Julian, broke the statues in the gardens of Lutetia, and threatened even our immemorial worship of wells and trees. So the Renaissance neglected altogether and left for dead the exquisite last of the Gothic; planted Goujon's caryatides upon the green walls of Philip Augustus and dominated the roofless turrets and the crumbling machicolations of the old Louvre under the high pride of an Italian palace. So we, who retrace the pointed windows, yearn for the perfumes, the visions and the colours, and even in our every political creation do but recreate—whether we know it or not—the middle ages, are amused or more often disgusted by the great century from which we sprang. But if we are to comprehend the Revolution which was the outcome of that century, especially if we are to appreciate a character so steeped in the influence of that time, it is necessary to lose a little of this modern aversion and to love a little, if we are to understand it, the generation which used "Liberty" as a password or a talisman, and which by the arms of America and France, by the economic science of England created our own time.

What was that generation, and where can its influence still be found?

I should be ungrateful to the forest of Marly and to the stone basin hung with silence, were I to forget the men whose shadows can still startle us at evening or the impress of the great kings. The genius of these woods does not pass, or if it passes, passes in a slow transformation that infinitely exceeds the hurried movements of men and that lives the slow life of the sacred

trees. It would seem as though the presence of the dead were native to the undergrowth and the neglected lawns, and as though whatever power preserves the past in its peculiar places, worked with a greater mastery under the veil of loneliness and sleep. Here the rare echoes are returned as though from a grave space of years, the springs have an older gaiety, the autumns a sadness more majestic, the summers are more profound, the winters have a more Saturnian brooding because Time mingles with them all: and the half-forgotten human minds from whose clear vision proceeded, and in the framework of whose society was formed the chief enterprise of politics, visit these places again, I think, for their influence is certainly to be discovered here.

Nor here only: the courtiers whom Voltaire delighted, the women whose eyes caught the new enthusiasms of humanity, the swords and the youth that were to marshal the great wars, are found—or something more than their memories is found—wherever the scrolled gates and the severe avenues still lead to unspoilt manors. There is a great house by the pleasant and misty Orge upon the way to Orleans, in whose noble rooms or by the shores of whose wide and secret lake you may discover that spirit alive; there is in the meadows of the Boutonne in the western Pastures, haunted and alone, an inn where the Girondins held their table for an evening as they went up towards Paris and their republic in the declining summer of '91; everywhere France preserves, exterior to and higher than, the limits of change, the walls and the gardens to which these men can return.

By such influences my own childhood and youth were in part surrounded. Even after a hundred years something in the flesh remained of it. Remote and secluded, there were characters which held to the tradition; women from whom I heard of their fathers

in the guard of the Palace, and men strictly formed in what had once been the new stoicism of the Emile and fixed and anchored backwards to the legend of Diderot and the hard crystal of the Encyclopædia. I should, then, be able to show what influences they were that trained the early manhood of Robespierre; what that generation was whose every impress he received and of whose salvation in Rousseau it was his in particular to make an exalted and irrefragable creed.

Of that society, the heirs and executors of so vast and changeful a past, the main imprint was leisure. By which I mean, not the leisure which wealth or a secure pride convey—pride was but in a powerless few, wealth was rare and attached often to a mere office. I mean that the entire framework of the old régime presupposed and compelled repose and the spontaneous action of the mind. The least instructed of the poor, the most unbalanced and cynical of the rich alike moved in an atmosphere of economic protection, of custom and of set tasks. The eager competition that accompanies the rare re-births of history, that spurred the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries, that has enfevered and exhausted our own generation, was absent even from the conception of the men who preceded the Republic. And if a large repose was the lot (as it was the lot) even of wretched peasants who lacked bread and wine, still more was it the moulding condition of the professional class into which the vigour, the honesty, and the initiative of the nation had gathered. There was thrown over them as over the nobles, but over them with a more creative effect, the invariable and perhaps beneficent effect of ample room and quiet hours. In their art they produced or admired the mists of early morning, the faces of young girls, the charming promises of April; in their music simple and enduring cadences, airs rather than harmonies; in their letters, the subtle values of exact

phrase appeared. They enjoyed that unconscious agreement with their mould, that plenitude of satisfaction which, since it releases the mind from the rasp of effort, fires it for direct creations, and fits it to overthrow the very environment which it thinks eternal. Nothing in the Revolutionaries more startles our moderns than this, that they took for granted so much and had so many dogmas. Yet it was partly the same spirit which forbade even the fashions to change until the whole flood of the new world had broken; just when that generation was fullest of Nature, just then it would have seemed to them rank madness to have grown a beard.

The Professionals then—to whom of course Robespierre belonged—were compelled by the conditions of their time to use intellects which no stress fatigued: they sought principles, and leisure discovered philosophy. The sentiment and the genial civilisation of their lives made them accept that Philosophy as absolutely as they accepted their social conventions.

Partly their education (classical, severe, scholarly, instinct with Rome), but much more the huge moral deficit of the time, the great social debt that demanded payment, and by which Europe had swung out from the normal, turned that Philosophy into the channel of politics, and at last this phenomenon was apparent in the rank where some great nobles, many squires and all the lawyers mingled—that they had in their leisure returned to the abstractions which are at the base of political science. Their art and music had tinged those abstractions with a colour of sensitive affection; the spectacle of a world visibly decaying from the effect of political inequality had lent passion to their convictions, had made them regard this faith of theirs as a kind of water of youth, and their very conventionality had left the mind free to create a new society upon the plan of their creed.

This tide of influence threw up upon its crest the fame and the influence of Jean Jacques Rousseau. With the mention of his name a long digression is necessary, for it was he who cast into an exact mould and forged into permanent form the demand of the eighteenth century. It was given to him alone to restate with exactitude and power the universal theory of the State: it was of Rousseau dead that the generation of the Revolutionaries made themselves apostles, and it was of Rousseau's formula that Robespierre in especial made something, as it were, divine: a unique and permanent revelation of the perfect state.

The state may be explained or left unexplained. It commonly seems of little moment to the security of its order and of less to the happiness of its citizens whether its analysis be attempted or no, for it is evident that our human nature makes (as it is made by) society, and that we live in our own country as in a native and necessary air. Nevertheless it will ever be the attempt of men, since men are also reasonable, to develop and maintain some explanation of their arrangements, and to discover those first principles upon which obedience to a rule and the nature and limits of political authority are founded. And this attempt springs from two sources: first, that the eager and doubtful mind of man, conscious of the divine within it, and therefore malcontent with the mysteries and limitations by which it is surrounded, will not rest from attacking and resolving the disturbing complexity of its environment; this spontaneous force of the intellect is the source of the social as of every other philosophy, and is the prime and noblest mobile of political inquiry. The second source of such a science is more immediate and practical. It resides in the necessity which change produces for some standard of continuity. How is this new condition or that unusual combination

of circumstances to be met without a disarrangement of our social tradition and without offence to that sense of justice in whose satisfaction alone humanity can repose? We cannot answer these new questions unless we have arrived at some clear principle from whose application to the modern circumstance a special rule may be deduced. Such and such an institution by its very age seems to have introduced a new offence into living; we are in danger of confusing things and ideas, we are disturbed and feel a necessity of correcting back to a normal outline the excrescences of time. But in what measure are we to act? Are we in a particular case to abolish, to reform, or to reinvigorate? We cannot tell unless there have been laid down some few clear absolutes by which the condition of that institution may be judged. This practical need, the need which gives rise to codes and is reflected in ritual phrases, is the second origin of political theory, and so true is it that humanity cannot finally escape its action that the very men who most affect to despise metaphysical definitions, and who are most proud to pin themselves to custom for the regulation of their country, are themselves, in that sanctification of mere habit, proposing a tremendous dogma of universal application by which some few states have outlasted fevers, but a hundred have been bled to death and finally destroyed.

I have said that the eighteenth century of its nature was impelled by the first of these forces; it tended to philosophise. Physical discoveries already sufficient to excite were not yet so numerous nor so wide in range as to confuse the deductive powers of the mind; and, as I have said, order and a kind of artificial quiet which brooded over the ruins of the old world commanded the minds of men for whom manual labour and economic strain were alike unknown, to examine and define themselves. Moreover the period possessed this mark of high

abstraction, that its speculation covered all the field of thought, and that no one was content till he had linked up the various provinces of inquiry into a united system. Locke that wrote of government, also made education a hobby, and coloured all he wrote by his cold appreciation of the sequence of ideas; Rousseau that wrote of government, also made education a hobby, and coloured all he wrote by his instinctive and passionate regret for a lost simplicity.

But if the eighteenth century would of itself, by its quality of leisurely decay, have framed philosophies, and in framing them would necessarily have devised for its intellectual satisfaction a theory of the State, there was also and especially present in it what I have called the second source of political science. It was in extreme need of a guide and standard for reform.

It is not a necessary accompaniment of secular change that this need should be felt, though it is an invariable effect of time that such a need should exist; but our western Europe by the great historical accident which makes it the evident head of the world not only felt the need of, but suffered the actual demand for, reform. It not only knew that it was sick; it also conceived an appetite for health. For our civilisation has, above all others, great diversity of parts coupled with clear and united memories; the soul of Europe is one, personal and (it would seem) unaffected by time; its body is differentiated to excess, and bears a thousand marks of a changing historical environment. From the complexity of its structure and the variety of its origins proceed those anomalies which threaten at great intervals to destroy it; but from its principle of unity and from its consciousness of itself Europe perceives and combats the approach of its own dissolution. The thread is never lost, the basis of equilibrium is not forgotten. We preserved in the darkness of the ninth century as in the troubling

glory of the sixteenth the terminology, the method of thought, the mode of beauty, and the main conquests of the mind which we had inherited through those thousand years; we have still in Europe one language, and even our shrines are the same.

A hundred years ago it was not a local trouble of invasion nor a passing mania for wasting our energies in deserts, nor even the rebellion of a part against the whole that threatened us, but something graver and more universal. The whole fabric of Europe was in a dislocation between its outer self and the ideas upon which that self reposed. It is true to say that the supernatural had never disappeared so nearly from the western mind —yet never had the social institutions raised upon the recognition of the supernatural absorbed more wealth or supported a more dangerous luxury. Land was owned as the Romans owned it, men thought of that ownership as absolute — yet the terms, the expensive formulæ, the irritant conventions attaching to land were still feudal, and an absolute dominion was dealt with as though it were a tenure. The conceptions of punishment and restraint were those of a society whose central organisation, homogeneity, and facile communications permit a certain mild and consistent pressure—yet the criminal courts of Europe retained (though they tampered with) the crude violence that accompanies insecurity and that punishes by vengeance the palpable crimes of primitive and isolated communities. A hundred examples might be given of the tension which racked Europe as the populations awoke to these anomalies. One more enormous than all the rest overshadowed and menaced her. We, the makers or the heirs of the Christian theory and the Roman law, had lapsed into the grossest form of inequality. A direct domestic power, mixed and disguised here and there with an indirect and economic control, gave to an ill-defined oligarchy the

privilege of an isolated control. That privilege was accompanied always by ignorance of human conditions, often by insolence, sometimes by a glaring contrast between the man and his pretensions—yet it coexisted with a mode of thought that spoke of humanity in the general, with a theory of jurisprudence drawn from the strict egalitarianism of the Roman Code, and commonly with the political importance of the nobles.

The century at its very opening set out under the guidance of Locke to perfect an instrument of remedy which a hundred years of discussion had already freed from custom and confusion. It formularised and made familiar a prime theory of the State. Before its first generation was grown old the educated and articulate part of Europe had universally consented to repeat a species of creed, to admire a rational basis for the State, to give a reply in legal form to every question of political right, and to every interpellation against authority. They explained the machinery of society by the legal metaphor of contract or mutual obligation, and deduced from this definition the clearest rules for legislation and the most logical excuses for the exercise of governmental power.

There still lingers in our academies a debate as to whether the men of the eighteenth century chose the right metaphor wherein to express the fundamental truths of politics. The debate is but an irrelevant and tedious discussion of nomenclature, worthy of the atmosphere in which it flourishes. There exists a true theory of the State which has everywhere been accepted, and is, in many forms, the starting point of all political knowledge. We differ as to the best form of the executive; as to the best machinery for connecting that one function with the whole; as to the proper mode and extent of the exercise of legislative power. We differ upon the reality and value of local characteristics, and upon the practical effect of special reforms; but we are agreed that sovereignty

must ultimately reside in the community, that subjection to an equal law is the condition of citizenship, that the governed are normally a part of government. These truths, which the noblest of English documents has called "self-evident," may be expressed as being part of the nature of man, as being a reflection of the divine plan, or they may be yet more precisely laid down and be made capable of more exact deductions by the use of mathematical or legal metaphors. But whether the organic, the theological, or the contractual method be used, the end is the same, though each is fitted to special problems. They are all but indirect ways of presenting what escapes direct definition: that there must in a normal and living state be a circulation of power from the individual to the community, and through the executive of the community back to the individual again; that the moral right of government reposes upon an implied consent, and that a state is in its fullest perfection only when the interior liberty or balance which makes us self-dependent beings is in part transformed into an exterior and civic liberty of the whole.

The men of the eighteenth century, inheriting a certain tradition of phrase and needing something applicable and direct, used the legal expression of this truth, and chose to express its nature by the parallel of a CONTRACT of association or employment.

So insistent was the approaching call for change that the precision of the terms in which politics should be defined increased with every treatise: became the test of every opinion. A standard of strict regularity and of the utmost simplicity was felt in that time to be not only consonant to the clarity of its thought, but necessary to the terrible work which refused to be delayed. The second generation of the century, the men whose activities coincided with the Seven Years' War and the lethargy of France, the rise of the cabinet system in

England, had heard no other than the legal form of social science, and would have regarded as merely barbarous other theories than that which now explained so easily the nature of the State; nor, however much they differed upon the results of its application, could men of the most opposite camps conduct even a quarrel save in terms of the Social Contract.

The third generation, the men who had Louis XVI. for a contemporary, came under an influence that directed and in part produced the Revolution; for the general philosophy and trend of the century was gathered up, woven, stamped by the genius of Rousseau. The nature of his influence is very commonly ignored, yet to ignore it is to miss the very spirit of the Revolution. Rousseau may be said to have grasped all the material of the time and to have worked in it that mysterious change whereby the inorganic clusters into organic form, lives and can produce itself. The wit, the irony, the indignations of the eighteenth century, the certitude also that was at their root, he, whose wit was peevish and slight, and whose indignation tearful, transformed from vague inanimate passions into a kind of personality that could will and do. Thus he who could be said to have fashioned nothing yet created something, and without the power to discover or to frame he had that rare inexplicable mastery by which breath is blown into the clay.

It is useless to ask whence such a peculiar force proceeded, as it is useless to analyse the poets. It is enough to note the great evidences of it that appeared not only in his work but in the vast effects which that work produced. In his sincerity, his backward yearning for a past Eden, his inhuman sensitiveness at the contact of the world he had all the character of the men that impel the origins of religions and he was found (after not a little rebuke) to be the agent of a mission. Moreover, all this chiefly shone in the talent peculiar to such rare

forerunners, for this prophet under the searching and withering light of an intense rationalism was granted what none of those cynics or well-poised critics of his had known—the living word. Those who least comprehend his influence are those who least apprehend the value of his medium: the direct force and ultimate keen edge of the French phrase. Men who profess astonishment at the spell he threw over the nation are like foreigners who misread half our own history because they cannot weigh the power that the Jacobean translation of the Bible has exercised over the English race.

This man did many things to the innumerable youth that succeeded and attempted to fulfil his plan. He touched them with extravagant simplicities, filled them with uncontrollable angers against injustice—angers that blundered against the unnecessary balance of things. He bequeathed to them, more than is fitted for the humour and doubts of this world, an angry gift of tears. Most ignorant of childhood, he propounded for them fantasies of education in which the brooding evil of mankind was passed aside, yet, child-like and a dreamer, he inspired them with a power of vision. Because of him there were landscapes in the Revolution, and Nature, her distances and her infinite moods, ran, from his sources, through the tramping of their armies and the whirlwind of their debates. But one thing in especial he did beyond all these. In the shortest of his pamphlets, the "Contrat Social," he fixed in little adamantine clauses the political creed which men demanded.

That system has been identified with what we loosely call democracy. The identification is inappreciative and, on the whole, erroneous. What Rousseau wove together as the ultimate political expression of his time was a body of exact and correlated assertion deduced from this prime truth that what is common to all men is utterly beyond the accidents by which they differ, as in mathematical

science one dimension is beyond and infinitely contains the last—as a solid exceeds a plane. So the Church has spoken of souls; so the Empire had written of citizens. Government to be government of right, proceeded from the union of such units, which, but for their union, could not be. That corporate entity, the Nation, had a Will, and the expression of that Will was the Law. So Rousseau, within limits that could afford to be exiguous because the material he used was imperishably hard, devised the political formula that was to remould Europe.

Upon these postulates and by the trumpet of a marvellous prose he proclaimed the Reform, and fixed in the minds of his contemporaries definitions of political right. As it was into a political channel that the public need was more and more urgently directed, this political Right soon seemed the whole of Right; its establishment and defence acquired the force and quality of a religion. The whole community was to be, manifestly and explicitly, the Sovereign; the executive was to become openly and by definition its servant; the vague thesis of equality, upon which jurisprudence reposed, was brought with exactitude and vigour into every detail, and made a test of every law; the limits of individual liberty were to be enlarged till they met for boundary the general liberty of all.

And yet, as I have said, there did not flow from this system the institutions which we associate with our modern overtoppling states. He postulated no crude machinery of majorities, he saw that government by deliberation was free in proportion as the community was limited and its life autarchic, growing its own corn. He made a faith in God and in immortality the necessaries of a happy nation. He wisely suspected representative bodies, that commonly proceed from, that always tend toward, and that can only vigorously coexist with plutocracy. Alone of his time he had the intuition that self-

government demands unchangeable and fundamental laws, and by the unconscious vision of such minds he perceived what history now proves of enduring societies, that such a constitution was more lasting if it came from beyond the wall and was imposed by an accepted "law-giver" who could regard the state from without and embrace it as a whole. So Etruria gave Rome her religion and so the forgotten message came from Crete to the Hellenes. He presupposed no republic though he made of kingship and all its parallels a magistracy; and he admitted in his age what his youth had denied and what all should perceive in ideal systems, that men are a little too prone to sin for such simplicity to preserve a facile existence.

Such was the development of political theory in the eighteenth century, and such was the most famous exponent of its system when, eleven years before the opportunity for its application arrived, Rousseau that had survived to read the Declaration of Independence, died and became a god.

I have dealt at this length with the politics of the time and with the organ they produced, because the tragedy with which this book is concerned is political. I return to the character of Robespierre and take up again its main condition—that he was a man of the old régime. A man so utterly the product of his day could not but accept all this political standard as a mathematical truth, nor could he help revering its exponent as the seer and guide of a necessary change.

He took the first postulates of the "Contrat Social" for granted, knowing well that every one around him did the same. He deduced from them, and still deduced with a fatal accuracy of process, with a fatal ignorance of things, and with no appreciation of the increasing chances of error, until his deductions had departed prodigiously from their starting point, and began to prove

themselves in every practical application absurd. The resistance which such absurdities met he thought to be a wilful rejection of strict logic, due to the corruption of private motives or to the casuistry of wicked men. In such a path, wholly of the mind and divorced from reality, his being was absorbed.

When we say that Robespierre was entirely a man of his time, it means, of course, far more than this acceptation of the one political creed. It means the bright dress, the busy attitude, the Latin training, the pedantry of classical allusion which I have already mentioned, and which will appear very evidently in his actions. It means also that there was inherited in him, and that he was reminiscent of, the charm which clung like a September mist to the society of even his rank—for that rank was nearly noble. A certain bearing and manner, a certain carefulness in his relations with the world, were part of the toilet and the phraseology to which he had been born. This, which the glory of the Revolution obscures, it is imperative that any student of his life should remember, for as the turbulence and frenzy of '93 proceeded, his ordered figure almost shone against a scene of so much disorder. His absorption in his own rank and generation involved all this; but though he must always be imagined coloured with the special habits of his environment, it is yet the atmosphere of political dogmatism whose origin I have examined at such length, which must be chiefly retained when one considers him in history. It was this political atmosphere that Robespierre breathed, and thought the mere natural air of the world. He was hardly born when the famous pen was moulding the details of the "Contrat Social"; when first he could speak the lawyers of the country towns were making it their talk. The stagnant security of provincial life that never fails to exaggerate the characteristics of its generation, that turns the social code into a deca-

logue, that solemnly retains the chance example of the rich, and that ignores the cynicism with which a capital can temper its enthusiasms; the unlaughing temper of a decaying family pride; the effect of early scholastic interests, and of college prizes, and of his masters' praise; the decent drawing-rooms of middling wealth; the vague but continual adulation of contented elders and obscure women—all these make any man not possessed of disquieting vigour sink into the hardest rut of his time, and Robespierre long before his thirtieth year had taken every phrase of the coming reform as unquestioningly as a discovery in physical science or a new process in geometry.

Now there were in France, and for that matter throughout Europe, thousands of men to whom the accidents of that generation were as native, and its political creed as unquestioned as they were to Robespierre. What, then, lifted him out from all those thousands whom in even mediocrity of vision he largely resembled? It was the second and much rarer character which I gave him at the head of this analysis: that whatever he held, he held it with incredible tenacity, and that he had in his mind an impregnable fortress wherein he preserved his convictions unalterable.

Those whom it is customary in soft times to call fanatics are of two kinds. There is he who maintains what he very well knows to be incapable of positive proof, and very far from being a self-evident proposition —as, that the Book of Mormon fell from heaven, that Pinkish Elephants are alone of animals divine, or that some chief or king is descended from a Bear. The fanatic that would convince others of these truths will sometimes threaten with the sword, or be at the pains of working wonders to prove them; but most commonly it is by an earnest advocacy and by the power of insistent repetition that he will convert his hearers to accept

his vision. It is his glory that the thing he premises has in it something wholly unusual, and he praises it as a chief virtue in his proselytes that they accept reality by the channels of affection and appreciation rather than by those of comparison and experience. Robespierre was emphatically not of this kind.

But there is a second kind which has often, oddly enough, a more irritant effect upon humanity than the first. They attach themselves to some principle which is or highly probable, or generally acceptable, or even self-evident, and armed with this truth, which few care (and sometimes none are able) to deny, they proceed to a thousand applications of their rule which they lay down as an iron standard, crushing the multiple irregularities of living things. Of these it has been well said that they go to the devil by logic. It is in their nature to see nothing of the mysteries, and to forget that the aspects of truth must be co-ordinated. They do not remember that the Divine Nature in which all truths are contained and from which all proceed, has not as yet been grasped by the human mind, and they fail to perceive at how prodigious a rate the probability of divergence increases as deduction proceeds step by step from its first base in principle. Yet so strong is the current of deduction in us that when such fanatics most disturb and torture us by their practical enormities we are for ever reproaching ourselves with the unreasonableness of our instinctive opposition, and thinking, as their system reposes on a truth and is consistent, that therefore its last conclusions may not be denied; and it is this weakness in us that gives fanatics of the latter sort their power. Of this kind were the lawyers of the later middle ages, of this kind are the defenders of many modern economic theories, and of this kind was Robespierre.

The man who believes in this fashion and who applies

his belief as this sort of conviction impels him, displays many secondary characteristics which, when we have noted them (and added some personal accidents to complete the picture) will put before us in its larger lines the singular temper of Robespierre. Thus he will have an appearance of conceit or vanity, but that appearance will be misleading; for it is not the ordinary man's simple repose in self—it is his devotion to the obvious, his knowledge that he is absolutely consistent, that makes Robespierre an egotist. No man, almost, in history so incessantly haunted his audience with his repeated personality—but he certainly imagined that he was but emphasising the equality of men, the immortality of the soul, and all the other connected dogmas of the perfect State. He was infinitely suspicious and for ever seeing himself abandoned—but it was because he was quite certain of his truths, and was convinced (generally with reason) that others less single-minded than himself were acting against what they knew to be political justice. It was not he but justice that stood alone in the hall; his opponents were opposing not him but self-evident and conspicuous truth.

Again, this unique conviction destroyed humour and proportion. Did he hear a gibe against his wearisome insistence? It seemed to him a gibe against the liberty and the God whom he preached. He missed relative values, so that he was in politics like a man who in battle has no sense of range; he blundered unexpectedly upon oppositions; he shot short or over the heads of opponents. By as much as matters were removed from his immediate handling he judged them wildly—I mean in practical affairs. Thus his handling of the Jacobins was admirable and uniformly successful, of the Parliament generally so, of the Provinces and Paris somewhat uncertain, of foreign affairs puerile; nor did he in any single instance that I can recall perceive the ultimate and

practical consequences of a decree launched on an existing and complex society; he was content to judge each law of itself by the touchstone of the One Truth.

But the converse is also true, and this is a matter not sufficiently seized in the general wonder at his success. In proportion as things were quite near him and of his own audience he understood them. He had proved himself a successful advocate before '89—after it he can be shown to have watched faces well and to have gauged the temper of crowds. He rode the Jacobins, and time and again could steer the Parliament when others failed. I will even believe that but for the singular lapse which closed his life, and to which I shall in a moment allude, he would have continued to the end to impress and direct the Great Committee.

He has been called implacable in his hatred—here again, as in his vanity, a false impression is conveyed. He was bewildered by the opportunist, and still more by the man who was tenacious of ideals other than his own. He could not but believe the man who dealt with facts and who arranged a combination of forces to have about him something impure; he could not but believe the man who was attached by affection to this or that inconsistency to have about him some aberration of morals. That practical temper and those inconsistencies of affection which are the general tone of all mankind, he, on the contrary, imagined to be peculiar to some few evil and exceptional men, and these he was for removing as abhorrent to the perfect State and corrupting to it. "You say that self-government is of right, and yet you will not immediately grant the suffrage to all? You are insincere, a liar, a deceiver of the people." "You say you believe in God, and yet you oppose the execution of this atheist? You are corrupt and perhaps bribed. If God be really God, this infinite God and his Majesty must certainly be defended. But perhaps you do not

believe in Him—then you also must go the way of the man you are defending." "You say the people are sovereign, and yet you are seen in the house of men who approved of the middle class militia firing on the crowd? Then you are a traitor." Wherever men of the usual sort perceive but one of the million inconsistencies of life—inconsistencies that vary infinitely in degree, and that must be of a rare sort to be counted as crimes or aberrations—Robespierre saw but glaring antitheses; something unjust, untrue, and very vile.

While theory thus led him to violent animosities, it forbade him sincere affections. This, which is the widest gap in the texture of his mind and the principal symptom of his unnatural abstraction, explains a great part of his adventures. There can be no better corrector of intellectual extravagance than the personal love of friends, for this gives experience of what men are, educates the mind to complexity, makes room for healthy doubt, puts stuff into the tenuous framework of the mind, and prevents the mere energy of thought from eating inward. Many loved him. One man, Lebas, died simply for his sake. Another, St. Just, though losing a little of his illusion at the end, for many years made a messiah of Robespierre. He himself cannot be said to have loved with consistent passion a single individual. He was not without kindliness, he reciprocated adoration with courtesy and goodwill, but his soul lacked whatever organ can attach us to our fellows. Nor had he, as I think, in spite of his sensitive hours, his musings at sunset, and his frequent seclusions, those permanent emotions which are correlative to human affections. For all his lonely walks and reveries, he took, as I should imagine, but slight pleasure in colours, and was divorced from Nature —from the movement of life, and from the troubling inspiration of distances and wide horizons.

Again, to be so absolutely sure of so many things

because one has them all connected in a perfect system must of necessity breed an insane intolerance, and, perhaps, persecution. I do not mean an intolerance of plain outrage or a persecution of men that deny the first principles of political morality; I mean an interference with the minutest actions and with matter remote from the prime springs of opinion. It is a grave historical error to confuse Robespierre with the Terror—indeed, it is an error no longer committed save by historians whose ignorance of the French language and of recent research preserves them in a traditional net; but his special use of the Terror, the few instances in which he leant personally upon its awful authority, were of the very kind that men can least patiently bear; they dealt with domestic matters, with chance phrases, with private morals. He has been called a Puritan; he was partly an inquisitor. His idea that he was the servant and agent of pure right made him in this and in that a tyrant, just where tyranny is most monstrous. To one man or another, for moments only, a tyrant; but a tyrant just in those little things wherein tyranny is most intolerable.

It would be very false to find in all this an absence of the great virtues; their balance and general presence it was that he lacked. Certainly he loved truth, making it indeed far too easy of attainment, and thinking it entirely achieved in that one formula of one department of inquiry which possessed him. Certainly, also, he loved Truth in action—Justice. Or rather he could not tolerate that his conception of Justice (which was of course a purely political conception) should suffer the least injury. But, though he was too absorbed for Pride, he was empty of positive Humility altogether; and Charity (the appreciation of living things, and the salt and good moderator of life) was never granted to him at all. When men are judged by the right they could and meant to do—which is the final manner—he

will be judged with some leniency: for the thing in which he was wrapped up was an idea of fulfilling justice. It was so partial as to warp and destroy the mind; its insufficiency and misapplication offends the sense and angers a wider experience, yet it was—for him—an idea of fulfilling justice. That which condemned him at last among his contemporaries, which has somewhat falsified him in general literature, and will bring him no affection in accurate and detailed history, was, not that he did wrong, seeing well what right was, but that there was something misshapen in the outline of his mind; that his one temptation of power was not excused by ability, and that the extravagance of often absurd and sometimes monstrous conclusions was inharmonious to a character that burned with none of the interior and generative fires.

To this main direction of his spirit one must add a little literary ambition which never indeed controlled him, but which, since he was industrious, clung to and rather belittled his whole career—for he was incapable of great phrase. He had also a power of expression not wholly to be despised, connected with his certitude, always approaching and sometimes surpassing a conventional eloquence. He was sufficiently conscious of his inability in matters of construction and lay apart from action—and though he was attentive, laborious, concerned at the close of his life with a hundred details of government, yet real action was never demanded of him. It is an error to praise his courage or condemn his cowardice. He was firm, but never gave his firmness an opportunity of exercise save in matters purely moral. He showed no terror in the face of grave physical dangers; and he was wholly indifferent to the opportunities of combative fame—to all that side of his imperfect humanity nothing but negation applies. He would certainly have died—it may almost be said that

eyes. He tended under th
be convinced of his own s
of fame he hardened rathe
cut him off from men.

Whoever has in him sh
or grave lacunæ, these will
time if the whole characte
whole character of Robesp
appeared in any ordinary
brought into the most c
entirely political, and—not
subjected to a great strain
in him, that in order to i
upon the world he gave u
upon which alone his force
his talisman. It was with
period of the Revolution th
ing, became at last appare
chosen, power, but not till t
natural limits of negative de
something positive and disti
to which the general genius
experiment was like the t
machinery of great power w
things split and cracked. t

political effect of Robespierre. To what is such a spirit fitted? In times of peace to a consistent obscurity; in times of armed change to be a sign or watchword, to be worshipped or followed as a name.

This truth, that such unnatural consistency in the exposition of a new creed uplifts the cold expositor and makes of his name something other and far greater than himself, is the reading of Robespierre. It was hardly he that stood in the Jacobin mind of '91; it was not he himself at all that was returned first deputy of Paris in '92, least of all was it for the true Robespierre that the Commune rose. The centre of an office, an insignium, he lasted till he attempted to rule, and then the illusion fell in ashes. Here is perhaps the solution of the capital problem of the time, why this small exsanguine figure should have passed unscathed through such heats and, insistent, restrained, should have led such a column as the shouting march of the Reform.

For what was the Revolution? Whence proceeded the indomitable armies and the new songs? The underthing which we touch in the single lines of the poets and in certain phrases of music, nourished it from within. It lived by the guide of the soul, it was full of that flame which burns up once suddenly in the lives of men when the boy leaps into manhood. There ran through it the vigour by which the springs also come and whatever enters into youth from the world outside. There was a spirit in it which is the whole theme of Lucretius, the centre of being, the power to create. To have looked into the souls of the Convention (by which Robespierre first was raised and which at last he controlled), would have been to experience every shade of energy, of desire, and of irradiation, of colour, and of force. In that company he passed, a portent; a pale exception that had been turned for a time to an idol, but that, in the coming back of the realities, contrasted and jarred. It

was the dull and early dawn of a July day, coming in by a shaded window, and slowly revealing things that ended him suddenly as a dream is ended.

He stood, a pale exception, a man all conviction and emptiness, too passionless to change, too iterant to be an artist, too sincere and tenacious to enliven folly with dramatic art, or to save it by flashes of its relation to wisdom. When so many loved and hated men or visions, till their great souls turned them into soldiers, he knew nothing but his Truth and was untroubled.

The hopeless oneness of structure that is for living things a negation of life, the single outlook and exiguous homogeneity of his mind, made him in the first troubling hopes of the Revolution a shaft or guide, in its dangers and betrayals an anchor, in its high, last, and vain attempt to outstrip our human boundaries, a symbol, and in its ebb of return to common living a tedium and a menace. For when men full of human complexity reposed at last in victory and had leisure to balance things again, he was seen to have neither instinctive human foreknowledge nor the sad human laughter, and there was no exile in his eyes.

# CHAPTER II

## THE DESCENT AND YOUTH OF ROBESPIERRE

ROBESPIERRE was born, somewhat unduly,[1] at two o'clock of the morning of May the 6th, 1758, in his father's house at Arras. His ancestry, his father's position, his name, the very parish in which he was born determine for us with the greatest precision the conditions that should have impressed his whole career, for it is remarkable that in the case of this man, whose inner part stands like a riddle in modern history, the original conditions of life and its externals are certainly more distinctive and possibly better known than is the case with any of his contemporaries. His family, house, occupation, friends, all point to one special type so familiar to French society, that we should of right expect in him a character simple and consonant with its peculiar tradition. We find, upon the contrary, nothing but an empty frame; we are given the limits of his action and the boundaries of his experience; but what he became, subject though he was to those limits and boundaries, was something dissonant.

Nevertheless it is of primary importance to know these conditions of his birth, because it is only in them that we can establish the arena wherein his mind took action; and since they all centre round the long descent through which he could trace his name, it is in the story of his family that I would begin to show the atmosphere by which he was surrounded.

A tradition of some value gives an Irish origin to

[1] His father and mother were married in January. He was born in May.

after the supposed date
the first years of the se
established in Carvin, a lit
you come from Lille, abo
There, throughout the c
notaries, the town-clerks, th
but it must not be imagin
with that middle legal cla
two hundred years of Bourl
which so much of the Revol

We have not to do with
and the rest in whom a soun
to an ignorance of the terri
server (whose name I forge
quoted) compare the parliam
a meeting of country attorne
gentlemen by a thousand t
importance to any student
should appreciate the exact q
such a principal figure belon

[1] It is remarkable that while hi
ludicrous guesses as "Roberts-Peter
name, the local tradition will have it
combination. The tradition, unsuppo
has in its favour the fact that this
refuge for the Catholics under

in Robespierre not only the son of a certain ancestry two centuries old, but the son also of men jealous of a social privilege, carefully moulded by a family profession into the legal habit of thought, tending in spite of themselves to lose a little of their claims to rank, yet keeping its memory, associating always, though on a somewhat lower plane, with the few families and interests that governed the Artois. Poor, never indebted, locally prominent but devoid of public ambition, their position in Carvin for a hundred years points to the whole of such a set of conditions. They were protected as religious refugees of a certain rank were throughout the north-east; that protection (as one would expect) increased with the influence of Louis XIV. and the slow reaction in England against the Stuarts. In the critical year of 1688 Robert de Robespierre[1] was granted the lieutenancy of the county of Épinoy, and though that function was nothing grander in practice than the headship of a local bureaucracy and tax-collecting machine, yet its title had enough sound about it to make it the occasional perquisite of nobility; and a family that while empty of land had kept to their "de" with pertinacity were partly rewarded, partly confirmed by such an appointment. When Yves de Robespierre, eight years later, applied to the Heralds' College for his arms,[2] it was but the reaffirmation of his right to bear a coat with whose traditional escutcheon he himself furnished the authorities.

The close of the seventeenth century and the opening of the eighteenth marked a slight change in the fortunes of the family; it lost a little of its pride, it took on a

[1] He was the great-great-grandson of Maximilian, the last of the family to marry a noble (Rictrude de Bruille).

[2] Yves was one of Robert's sons and the great-great-uncle of Maximilian. For the benefit of those who are interested in such things, I may mention that the arms were found by Hamel in d'Hauterive's "Armorial de la France" (i. 33, and p. 374), and are described as "Or, with a band sable; chargé, demi vol, argent."

little of ambition. It entered into the first of a series of inferior but well-dowered alliances, and yet the son of this first bourgeois marriage was raised to the higher branch of the profession, and was removed from the local dignity of Carvin to the more useful if more competitive society of the capital of the province. It was Robert's son Martin that married the daughter of a well-to-do post-master with large stables in the town, and their son, Maximilian (the elder), that settled at Arras as a barrister in 1720. It was he who bought the house of the Rue des Rapporteurs, who established the relations of the family with the Abbey of St. Waast and with the Archbishopric, and who wove the social web upon which the family depended for over seventy years.

The site and appearance of his house, the centre from which he built up the new foundation of the family, are typical of its character and future fortunes.

The Revolution, if a close examination be made of its principal actors, will be found to proceed from a few special provincial centres, for France, unified and centralised as she is, possesses beyond any other nation the energy that proceeds from the contrast and strong interaction of the almost tribal divisions that make up the whole. In that, Gaul is still Gaul; and I mention a few of those groups when I name the mountains of the higher Isère, the Delta of the Rhone, the great valley of the Gironde; the mysticism and conviction of Brittany, the sense of Champagne, the hard idealism of the highlanders of the Cevennes, the broad content of Normandy. With each of these something separate—Vizille, the war song; Vergniaud, the early revolt of Rennes, Danton, Jean Bon, or the rebels' march of 1793—is associated. But of these none form a more curious study than the group of provinces that hold the north-east—Flanders, Picardy and the Artois. Here is a spirit that should be of the borders, a place where the large heart of the midlands

and vines might meet the steady vision of the Teuton and mix to make a population of solid mediocrity. There is nothing of the kind. If such a barrier mixture is found anywhere in France it is in the profound and wholesome valley where the woods are fed by the shallow Moselle. It is not in the north-east. There, on the contrary, this paradox appears; whatever is old, Patois in speech and still attached to local terms and measures is also luxuriant, almost wanton, in art and in the manner of living. Rich Flanders is in their blood, what they say is eloquent; they are of that low country that brought forth Rubens on its far north-eastern, Desmoulins on its south-western edge. Their architecture is riotous in detail, verging on the fantastic in its general conception. They are a pasture-land in Europe; high towers dominate them; they paint the clouds and delight in woodwork and dark rooms. But all this has provoked and excited an opposite pole on the same soil. The French reoccupation, coinciding as it did with the first establishment of the Bourbon bureaucracy brought in a new class as frigid, regular and determined as the old was manifold and untrammelled. I will not deny that there was latent in the blood even of that class a potential enthusiasm, for these horizons will not let the soil rest, but as a body they were pushed by a kind of official reaction into a habit of order and somewhat pedantic accuracy in all affairs.

All this contrast is set out in stone in the town of Arras. There you have the old inner city full of the quaint and the grotesque; sprawling over it is the Abbey of St. Waast that a man might draw in a dream; that inner town is grouped round the superb, rich belfry of the abbey; it is marked at every corner by innumerable stepped gables, and to the smallest ornaments on the door-posts it calls up the voluptuous magic of Flanders and the tilled fens. Outside this nucleus in which Spain and Austria sowed the Renaissance in so rich a soil,

runs like a ring the cold town of the classical philosophers, of the bureaucracy, of the encyclopædia; the formal provincial streets that reflect in some poor way the spirit which the grand *siècle* had imposed upon the capital. By an accident that it seems fantastic to treat symbolically and that yet may be an effect of the elder Maximilian's judgment and partly a cause of his grandson's career, the house in the Rue des Rapporteurs was situated just within the official French quarter, yet in easy touch with the Flemish centre in which the bishop, the great abbey and the town life of the provincial nobility exercised their power.

The house[1] itself is small, square, unornamented, bourgeois, white. All built for utility, standing at a corner of two streets, immediate to the Place du Théâtre, close therefore at once to the posting houses of the Paris road and to the municipal offices, it has continued to fulfil even since the end of the Robespierrean connection some such purpose as that for which the old barrister designed it, being always tenanted by men of good position in the town though dependent upon its commerce or administration. It is wonderfully dull. There is no garden, no court, no sign of carving or careful panels; and its whole atmosphere is that of the unmomentous past lying behind the family; a tradition of exactitude and probity mixed with a little pride of name. For all this dulness and lack of colour something of their claims and legends survived. When Charles Edward,

[1] The Place du Théâtre is right on the road from the station. The Rue de Rapporteurs runs into the little square on its northern side, and the house of the Robespierres is the long white house on the left of the first corner. It must be remembered, by the way, that all my description of this as a long-inhabited freehold of the family's is debatable matter. There is proof in Arras that the Robespierres possessed other houses at various times, but I do not think it so certain that they lived in them or that one need necessarily doubt the universal tradition, including that of the family itself, that the White House was a family freehold of long standing.

having lost everything in the '45, took to mysticism, he founded, among others, a lodge of the Rosicrucians at Arras in 1757 and gave the headship of it to the son of the barrister in the Rue des Rapporteurs, the uncle of the Revolutionary.[1] That Catholic, quasi-noble and emigrant tradition, continued also in the growing intimacy between the family and the cathedral, but strong as the sentiment was it could not survive the effect of many years in which hard work had brought no fortune. The "de" which the ancestors had clung to so firmly became merged in the name,[2] and another of those unfortunate marriages which had already marked the decline of their pretensions came in this same year of 1757 to lower them further.

It was a love match. Maximilian-Bartholomew, the old barrister's son, a man of immediate impulse, fell into a violent and lifelong passion for the daughter of a brewer in the suburb of Rouxville, by name Carrault; his father strongly opposed the union. An intrigue hastened the marriage; by that, in all probability, the father's objection was overridden, and the race was continued on the insufficient dowry and the lower blood of this alliance.[3]

It is probable that Robespierre's birth (he was the eldest of four children of the marriage) broke down part of the old man's prejudice. At least he stood godfather

[1] In the archives at Arras the first proceedings of this lodge are signed "Ch. Stuwart" and "Deberkley"! It is interesting to those who follow the crop of secret societies which developed in the last century and their connection with freemasonry to know that the present "Constancy" Lodge at Arras claims, and can, I believe, establish a direct descent from Charles Edward's whimsical foundation.

[2] Robespierre's father and grandfather both sign "Derobespierre." He himself, successful and rising to public office in the capital, reassumed the separate particle, and did not finally drop it till as late as June 1790.

[3] That the marriage rather impoverished than helped the Robespierres is proved by the son's inability to set up a house of his own and by the lack of resources at the father's death.

at whose creation he ass
imagined himself an auth
of many of his contempor
with their name and to
tenacious of ancestry and
due to their own labours
legacy of public talent.
the France of which he l
have seen his nephew p
whose new vigour had ar
Convention; and though
his own son's name was r
is still represented in the
town, and continues to ex
the functions in which his c
Cambon, a principal archite
lution, sees in his descendan
fortune, profitable alike to
The sound bourgeois stock fi
officer, the merchant, and the
vital in France, and it was
administrative class was gra
in the Revolutionary traditi
more conspicuous example.
that played so great a part

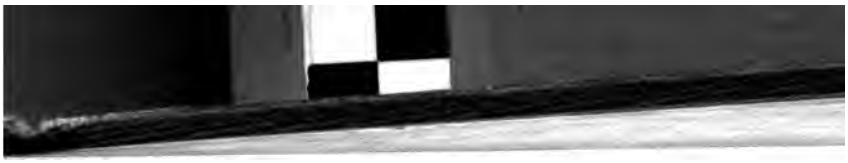
that of any contemporary; the exile and the death in poverty to which the meanness of the foreign garrison drove him had no evil effect upon the chances of his family, and did little even to promote its success. By a kind of natural inheritance his son took his place in '48, and continued till his death to exercise in the senate an influence as firm and wide as it was ill-advertised. A Carnot of the third generation occupied, with honour and devotion, the chief magistracy, and was killed in the midst of its duties; those of the fourth are rising to a continued eminence in the service of the Republic, a mixture still of the soldier with the man of letters and of science, and still proving the vigour of their Burgundian blood. The Cavaignacs, son and grandson of a less famous Conventionnel, yet take their place upon the long Republican tradition, and if their stoicism, touching as it does the boundary of the puritanical, is too high for their contemporaries, it yet continues to earn for their present as it will for their future representative the universal respect of the nation.

Robespierre should, then, have left some kind of family thread for history to pick up, if his fortunes had proved in any way parallel to those of his colleagues. They had been regicides as he had; they were without exception members of the band that was at once the advanced guard and the general staff of the Revolution; and if that prime factor in the permanence of political influence be considered—I mean the solid origins of ancestry combined with a long tenure of local government—his claims to such a posterity were, as the last pages have shown, superior to those of the men I have cited. But it is the note of Robespierre's life and of the subsequent chances of his house that his position and his legend were as unique and exceptional as his character. Whether it was the horror that the eddies and the backwash of opinion threw up upon his name, or more

French of that class are
out an effort, and in the
far as I can trace it, dis
most inconsiderable repre

Charlotte, indeed, the
into the reign of Louis Ph
pension that Bonaparte ha
of a government departme
diminished, throughout t
and those of the mona
dignified figure, she maint
life a reserve that was a li
which had warped her ch
there at rare intervals h
some chance visitor who
her friend and protectress,
but lately dead, several me
they turned their heads su
a Robespierre.[2] This last

[1] The last near collateral descen
nephew—was run over by a train n
local chemist, and with him ended
Grenelle, or did recently, in the Rue
Robespierre's first cousin, also born
oddly enough, has preserved the "
merchant, and has or had a son in





at Arras did not die without leaving for history the most valuable materials. Her notes upon her brother's youth, collected and amplified (not without rhetoric and ready-made phrases) by Laperronaye,[1] yet form the best original we possess on which to found our idea of the sombre adolescence and more contented early manhood which preceded his last five Revolutionary years.

When Maximilian was but seven years old, and before the youngest child, Augustin, could speak, the first blow of the many that were to drive his character inward fell upon him. His mother died, and his father, a man whose extreme sensibility had half unfitted him for assiduity and entirely for success, saw slip from him in a moment the affection for whose sake he had misshaped his career and checked the fortunes of his family. The shock did but hasten the process that his whole life had discovered. He could work no more. His practice left him, and by an impulse that is not uncommon to such men tortured by memories, he broke from the ruins of his duty and the associations with which his house was surrounded, to wander aimlessly beyond the frontiers, in Germany and in England, living at random on chance lessons and on such small sums as his relations could send him. He left his children to the more sober guardianship of their mother's family. His despair killed him; and the news of his death, reaching Arras when Maximilian had barely entered his tenth year, produced a yet more profound impression upon the boy than his mother's loss of less than three

is some mention in this book. I also have it on the authority of M. Audebrand that M. Joigneux, the senator for the Côte d'Or, who died five years ago, met her several times in 1830, and I have based part of my description on his notes.

[1] I have no space in a footnote to prove the genuineness of these memoirs upon which I have not hesitated to base my appreciation of Robespierre's boyhood, but a long note at the end of the book develops the argument in their favour. They have been thought false upon curiously little evidence.

years before. In the situation where he had now fallen many things combined to stamp permanently upon his habit of thought the hard directness which continued to distinguish it. His misfortunes had come just at the age when a precocious imagination may be most vividly affected. They were not so ample as to force him into quick and active observation. His poor father had left untouched the little patrimony at Arras; the youth that lay before him would necessarily be one of some humiliation and of continued labour, but of an assured if moderate success. To many the effect of such an introduction to life would be to breed a determination for material advancement, and a mere end in the recovery of wealth; but there ran round Robespierre's mind a covering of idealism which, if thin, was crystalline. It constrained his energies to particular channels, and gave misfortune the power not only to spur, but also and chiefly to mould and bend the mind. Thus early he began to consider his own self and his rights, and his isolation. He brooded and lost his boyhood. The eldest of that little family of orphans, perceiving already that the protection of his mother's people, for all their dignity and kindness, was something a little lowering to the name he had inherited from his grandfather, he took on responsibility and a habit of disappointed but persistent thought. It made him at last a scholar, then a lawyer, but it forbade him to forget or take life well.

There was at that time in Arras a bishop of the name of De Conzié, a great noble of course, as every bishop was before the Revolution,[1] but full of judgment and of heart, wise and willing to examine. An application was made to him to use his influence for the boy, and he very readily assented. Two generations of intimacy and good relations between the Robespierres and

[1] Of the 154 bishops that France enjoyed before the Revolution, but three were of the rank of the apostles; all the rest were territorials.

the see of Arras, and the memory of official connections throughout the province, made it easy to find the help that was needed. The great abbey of St. Waast, which was lord of a third of the town, and a coequal power with the king and the bishop in its government, procured him a scholarship in the University of Paris. I need not detail here the secular conservatism by which founders still disposed of the scholarships in those colleges, nor detail the story of the college of Arras.[1] It is enough for my purpose to mention that this little foundation had been merged into the great institution of Louis le Grand, which still keeps its place after the vast reconstruction of this hundred years. It was to those high walls and narrow courts that he passed in his twelfth year, and it was the Jesuits that trained for twelve years, as he passed into a pale manhood, the exact deductions of his mind.

So far his childhood at Arras had had little good and had languished. His sisters, placed by a similar care in an excellent convent (perhaps a trifle above their station), saw him from time to time, playing alone and especially devoted to his birds, his pet pigeons. Such lessons as he did showed his aptitude and precocity, and he went up to Paris expected to do well enough in his studies, with a character from his former masters of a rather melancholy taciturnity. But he was gentle. The entry into Paris, which is always a new pain to the French (for their hearts have roots at home) was perhaps a third grief to the child. He had lost both father and mother, now his home, and for two years he saw no more of his birds or his sisters. But a cousin, a Canon of Notre Dame, a De la Roche, a petty noble, in rank and sort what he was, often received him and left a tradition of gratitude until his death. In Paris at last he found

[1] I have a short note on it upon page 388 of my essay on "Paris" (published by Mr. Edward Arnold).

antique allusions that
nowhere more thickly
speeches, but they are
accuracy of the trainir
illustrate the academic
his future eminence.

His delicate, if still
mind, his refined if resti
him free to earn the este
the neglect of his equals,
a mad-cap from Guise,
health and vivacity, a ge
junior, became his fast fr
a kind of hero-worship, s
time in the high youth
was Robespierre (though
upon the letters of his c
his studies.

From his sixteenth
school in composition, la
classics, and saving that
philosophy, was already
the foundation. In his s
acquired received a rewa
to the student

had to be deputed to read him a Latin speech. Robespierre was very naturally chosen. The speech, such as it should be for such an occasion, revised moreover by the obsequious care of an efficient master, contained nothing of any moment, and is, I believe, destroyed The contrast, however, of this unknown child nervously reciting his panegyric in the magnificent but fatigued presence of what held all France, should stand permanently in the history of the time; because, taking them each simply as they were, brute accident was to set them against each other; a rare and momentary light was to put these two in view for ever; the fame of each vastly exceeding his natural obscurity; the one by the unhappy inheritance of a crown, the other by the pure chance of violent change were to be heard of after and remembered.

Nothing remains of his further studies. His scholarship presupposed a course of law; he bent himself to it for the three years that followed his degree. When he was twenty-two, in 1781, his connection with the college ended. He had earned its gratitude and patronage; his younger brother, Augustin, a boy of insignificant abilities, was permitted to succeed to the endowment, and he himself was voted a sum of £25 by way of a prize that was sometimes granted to those who had done best on the foundation. He wisely returned to Arras, where tradition, good-will, and some patronage awaited him, and where he had been familiar in the summer vacations since the death of his host and cousin in Paris. He took up an even life in the family house, harboured his sister, was easily enabled by his every limitation and virtue to adopt a laborious daily habit. There lay like a restricted, clear, monotonous road before him a career that fitted his persistent character. Its goal was the old legal position and social prestige that his family had earned, and of which he now took up

successfully the tradition his father had imperilled. It was able to satisfy that craving for recognition which was no determining character of his, but certainly an enduring foible. He was in reach of and could enjoy the station he demanded; it suited him to the full to admit the conventional superiority of some, and to receive the equally conventional solicitations of many more in his native town. The intense political convictions which underlay his mind would at the worst have seemed but an amiable exaggeration of words, at the best (and most probably) would have remained unheeded; for he was a man that found no necessity for their active realisation in the existence about him. His ambition was but to be the respected and successful lawyer of the Artois. He more than fulfilled it.

I have said little of the happy changes that his temper suffered by this transition from a morbid boyhood to academic success and local distinction: they must be imagined from what I have barely detailed of his adolescence. But that boyhood must be remembered, because men in great crises—sometimes by the mere waste of years—are found ever returning to the springs of their childhood; and so at the end to him, who had to pass through such a furnace to such a death, there returned the self-pity, the tenacious assertion of his rights, sufferings, and convictions, which certainly early misfortunes had branded into his mind. For the moment this destiny was peaceably obscured. He lapsed in his twenty-third year into the polite discussion that passed for the intellectual life, and into the minute graces that were the true interests of his rank and place and time. The atmosphere was native, and he continued increasingly to enjoy what was best in the Artois. It was not unwise to find enough in the good life of his town; it entered into him very fully, and when all such clothings were forgotten he maintained by a kind of

instinct up to the scaffold the little methods that were inherited from these eight years.

The life into which he entered had for its foundation that kind of practice at the bar of his province which, in its weight and yearly increase, is the mark of a prosperous future in the courts; it had literary occupation for its permanent satisfaction, and for its flower the conversation and manners of a sound society. That would be a very false judgment which would find nothing but the mean or the ridiculous in the narrow sphere wherein his professional industry triumphed, and whose careful provincial urbanity at once charmed, flattered, and trained him. It is true that centralisation had already reached its worst effects in the social spirit of France, and especially that the drain upon the economic resources of the country towns had struck them with lethargy. The transition from that state to the activity and local patriotism which distinguishes the modern municipalities of the country could only be forced by the Revolution: to the court and to Paris, Arras, or Guise, or Caen were little stagnant marshes. But there were features in the life of such towns which, while inferior in value to the political qualities they have since developed, yet redeemed their influence and made them specially fitted to be the training ground of the revolutionaries. Corruption and decay had but enhanced the position of the privileged classes within them; the guarantees surrounding leisure protected the growth of that conviction in abstract verities without whose presence reform is meaningless.[1] Philosophy of one school became a religion in these distant places, and they could furnish in a small way the spirit of academies. Had the change, which was a mechanical

[1] Allusions to the "Rights of Man," "Natural Law," &c., are five times more numerous in the Cahiers of the priests and nobles than in those of the Commons, and are practically absent in the agricultural petitions.

may hide itself. Democr
have survived; for, in the
the condition of endurance

Moreover a great cha
of their ritual. This charr
avenues where discussion l
Mall, or in the moats upor
see waters covered with sti
French, which are slow sti
under the old walls of the
tinually a light draught of
haunts them was once a
tempted but it partially exc
the formal and emotional ex
desire which is the spring
rounded and inspired the
furnished him with companic
permitted his ceaseless and v
tion; all that circle of "de'
swords, as it were, compelled

This gentle literary tide
channel of a local academ
common to many provincia
stituted society, half an ex
imitation of the fam

ceremony, boasting titles a little antiquated for the time, an election to it was yet a good mark of a man's position in his town, and it is worthy of notice that Robespierre filled his place in it as the successor of a canon of the cathedral. It was two years after his return to Arras that this honour, or rather status, was given him. Two years more and he was secretary to the society under the quaint style of "chancellor"—it was in this capacity that he received Carnot, then in garrison with the Engineers at Arras. He passed from that little office to the presidency of the body, and had the task of welcoming into it the daughter of Keralio, whose name, upon no evidence whatever,[1] has been linked with his in a kind of drama. He had become, though one of the youngest, yet one of the most industrious and perhaps of the most prominent members of this somewhat faded community, when the great doors opened on his thirtieth year and let in the furnace-light wherein the very memory of all this disappeared.

His connection with that provincial body was a small part even of the small life which preceded his public fame. Nevertheless it is in that framework that one can best judge a character in him that proved enduring—I mean his industry, and secondary success in letters. It was as Member of the Academy of Arras that he exercised rather than acquired the persistent habit of writing which bound itself into all his actions, forbade the growth in him of rapid decision or of sudden appeal, and perhaps contributed at last not a little to his fall. To nourish this

[1] Mademoiselle de Keralio, the daughter of a little known historian, herself aspired to letters. She wrote a "Life of Elizabeth of England" and drew up a plan for the universal history of the whole world from the earliest times to the present day. She later married Robert at the outset of the Revolution, entered Paris, edited with her husband the *Mercure National*, and was one of the principal advocates of Robespierre in the earlier Revolution.

habit he required nothing so weighty as fame, but at least a constant public mention, nor was he content unless his every expression was moulded by a literary standard. And this is somewhat of a contradiction in him and somewhat of a stumbling-block to his biographers; for his prodigious effect upon one generation of men depended upon an illusion or an appreciation very remote from the considerations of style. It was partly as an even orator, partly as a judge of assemblies, but mainly as one principle incarnate that he was able to arrest the attachment of men, yet in his own wishes, without a doubt, the wish to be remembered for a certain facility and polish of writing stood continually.

It is well neither to exaggerate the mediocrity of his compositions at this period nor his own ambitions with regard to them. They exhibit in their style the special politics which later, whether he were under the most grievous strain or the opportunities of the widest action, he was incapable of changing. They procured him some flattery. He gained an equal mention, and divided the first prize, with Lucretelle when the Academy of Metz offered a prize for the best essay on that abuse of the criminal law whereby the families of the condemned were struck with legal infamy. It was just such a subject, dealing with traditions of whose origins he had never heard, with anachronisms whose gradual development seemed to him merely monstrous, as was best suited to his even and ritual pen, and his treatment of it was sure to match the simple and definite sociology of the time. The thirty-odd pages of square, blue sermon-paper that remain as the proof of his labour have in them nothing which is not exactly consonant with his method. They contain the common condemnation of all that hung in a deadweight, undefended, about the progress of the old régime—the usual praise of, and appeal to, the young king, whom in France all then

looked forward to as the introducer of a new time; the Latin quotations, the peroration and the restrained and lifeless rhetoric of what has well been called the "good manners" of prose. The manuscript contains, moreover, curious signs of a habit that increased with his years, and that is typical of the conscious mind which directed his literary effort, for it is full of erasures and second thoughts. There remains nothing from his pen, hardly so much as a warrant or a hurried note, in which this feature does not recur; it is in keeping with his small, slow, cramped, and hesitating hand;[1] nor does the second (or third) phrase he may substitute ever express a second or third form of thought, it is ever the hesitation of style, or even the rewriting of the same thing after an interval of doubt.[2]

This success added a little to his local renown. It tempted him, in 1785, to a second competition, in which he failed—that of the Academy of Amiens—for an eulogy on the poet Gresset. The work is insignificant, and contains but one phrase to arrest the reader, the very typical sentence: "Gresset, you were a great poet, but you were more—you were a honest man. And as I praise your work, I shall not be compelled to turn my eyes away from your life." To any remonstrance that such platitudes verged upon the appalling, Robespierre would have replied that they dealt with a sublime truth, and he would have remained untouched; he was to find an audience for them and to preach them like a religion when exalta-

[1] The hand might be of any period. It is clear, not very sloping, but very small and irregular. He has one remarkable trick that the cynical might misinterpret: he never puts in a capital letter even after a full stop, save for the first person.

[2] There are several interesting examples of this nervous habit. In the warrant of the arrest of Theresa Cabarrus he signs his name, scratches it out, and signs it again. In his last speech he has three or four phrases (notably the threatening passage where he was interrupted) which are deleted and then rewritten in the same form.

tion had burnt up the saving balance of humour, and when the corrupt class, whose cynicism restrains such tediums, was destroyed.

Yet the praise of an eighteenth-century minor poet, of a man whom Greuze might have illustrated, and who, I think, moves exactly in the furniture of the time, should have suited Robespierre; for this anomaly is to be remarked in him, that of his insufficient and dull exercises in writing, by far the least dull and the least insufficient are to be found in themes that demand a little grace,[1] and this accident, which is remarkable in several letters, appears especially in his verse.

There was at Arras, side by side with and far less stable than the Academy of which I have spoken, a little trifling society, which seemed, as it were, the Academy at play. They called themselves "Rosati," met yearly in the spring beside the melancholy Scarpe outside the walls, drank wine, wore roses, and delighted each other with passable or valueless songs. To this society, a product of the passion for cabals and passwords which possessed the eighteenth century, all, or nearly all, the members of the Academy would come; here Carnot, Marescot, and Fosseux, the elderly clerics of the Chapter —all the small, straight world of the town—read rhymes which have been properly forgotten. Among these, those of Robespierre, possessed of little talent, and often passing the boundary of the absurd, yet did occasionally redeem themselves by a touch of grace, or even—what will seem surprising — a sustained irony. The little madrigal to Ophelia[2] is quoted with its ending couplet:—

---

[1] There is, of course, the example of a letter written to a lady who wished to paint his portrait. Hamel traces the MSS. of this only as far as 1862. It was then bought into a private English collection, and is now in the British Museum.

[2] Of whom tradition says that she was English.

"To be the more beloved of all
By doubting if beloved you are."

The "Mouchoir du Prédicateur" is what all the former readers of Voltaire were writing. Neither very witty, nor by any means original in style, it is yet on a level with the many easy little satires of these twenty years.

In all this mass of continual composition no energy is to be discovered, still less any bitterness, complaint, or judgment. His life had entered a quiet phase, his needs were satisfied; his local repute, increasing as he went, left him contented. The grappling conviction that underlay his method of thought met no obstacle, and was called to no exercise. If I have insisted thus far upon the industrious facility with which his ordered leisure turned to authorship, it is to introduce the permanent literary form in which he cast himself, which coloured all his later action, and which helped to make him, when the elections of the great year fell upon Arras, one of the few expositors of that forgotten town. Until that opportunity, however, during the eight years of his residence and practice, his verse and prose were but a sort of embroidery upon the serious work which established his name among his fellow-citizens and gave him the social basis from which he naturally obtained the ear of his province, on which he appealed in his election address, and in consonance with which he was returned a deputy to the States-General. That work was legal.

This tangible advantage, which suited his character to a nicety and explains his successful introduction to politics, was connected with the importance necessarily attached in France to local courts. There is in France no circuit of assize. A man pleads before the small fixed tribunals of the cantons or before the higher courts of the towns, and even an appeal need not appear at the capital, save under the rarest conditions. It is true that one great

division of legal work could only be done in Paris, even under the old régime. The fact that Paris monopolised Chancery and what we should call Parliamentary work drew many young barristers thither; but the bulk of legal work in France lies in the provinces, and this system of resident courts was yet more marked before the Revolution. In his province no code, but a mass of local custom, decided most criminal and nearly all civil decisions. These customs gave a complexity to the system of law which made it at once necessary and profitable to fix one's practice permanently in a provincial capital. By this means a man became a specialist in a matter that required the greatest industry to master; he was secure against an overstocking of the market in so hard a business. The confusion that these ancient customs made was increased by a mass of conflicting and over-lapping jurisdictions[1] that had their source in the same immemorial conservatism. It was a handsome living in itself to be able to give advice to clients as to the boundaries of these jurisdictions or the chances of his case escaping the interference of a side court as third party. It needs no further description of such abuses to show what opportunities they afforded to individual application, and how by mere example they forced men to react towards simplicity and reform. His first pleadings, however, did not last beyond a couple of terms.[2]

The friendship of De Conzié, and the academic success which had so well rewarded his first patronage, led that bishop to offer Robespierre within a year of his being called to the bar one of the minor judicial

[1] For instance, in Arras itself there were the Seigniorial Courts, the Bishop's, the King's and that of the Abbey of St. Wast, all existing side by side, with ill-defined jurisdictions; and superior to them all, though possessing no very exact powers, the provincial Council instituted by Charles V. in 1530.

[2] Michaelmas, 1781, and Hilary, 1782. At the end of the latter term he was offered the post I speak of.

posts within his gift. He was installed a magistrate in the ecclesiastical court. Insignificant as the office was, it carried with it, in the wretched conditions of the times, the power of life and death. Within a few months its duties disgusted a character in which the demand for reform and the faith in Rousseau, if pedantic and reiterated, were yet profoundly sincere. This disgust, springing in the main from his tenacity of opinion and a just estimate of the ignominies of the criminal law, was undoubtedly heightened in the case of Robespierre by the foibles that already warped his attitude towards the world. He was not without nervousness; his judgments, like his style, erred continually upon the side of sensibility. The classes also which lay in misery below his own somewhat perturbed his culture, as they certainly much more excited his sense of justice. It may have been as a general consequence of its duties that he resigned his place; it would seem more probable, as his sister directly testifies, that he abandoned it under the shock of having to pass a capital sentence.[1] In any case he begged to be relieved of the office, and lost by that decision neither the respect of his benefactor nor the prestige he had begun to enjoy among his neighbours.

He returned to his ordinary practice, and his success was immediate; but from the outset he mixed with that success a characteristic reputation for scruple. He wished to be singled out for his justice and his defence of the poor. He introduced into the most particular cases the most general and inopportune considerations—but he continually won his case. He won a case for the Carnots, whom he already knew, recovering a legacy for an old servant of theirs; but he so dragged in the immutable principles that the younger Carnot swore at him in court. He gave the most excellent advice to a man who had

[1] "Memoirs of Charlotte Robespierre," first edition, p. 69.

been disinherited under a will that left a large fortune "under condition of joining the reformed church"; the will was null at law, but Robespierre could not be content with saying this and giving legal reason, he adds in his advice to his client (a priest), "Remember that there is no more formidable enemy to liberty than fanaticism."

A much more famous case, one that went far on appeal and that, by the nature of the case, brought his name for a moment before the eighteenth-century philosophers, was a defence of the wealthy Vissery who had put up a lightning conductor on his house at St. Omer, and had thereby so affrighted an old maid, his neighbour, that she prosecuted him and his conductor as a public danger. It was ordered to be pulled down. On appeal this was reversed. On further appeal (when Robespierre is employed) the final decision was a kind of compromise. The mind of Robespierre was made for such a case. Here was philosophy and all the light of the century called into question! Here was Franklin to be defended! The very narrowness of his sincerity and zeal lent him power, and in a little while, what with his rising name and the nature of his brief, a certain fame spread about his subject. After winning his case in May 1783 (a bare year since he had accepted the magistracy of which I have spoken, and within a few months of his resignation) he was permanently established in the reputation that led at last to Paris.

Of the years that follow not very much has been preserved; their general tenor and the further foundation of his good position alone is certain. A few letters, one specially famous, a few decisions, are all the documents that remain. It was during this period of his early manhood, as he approached his thirtieth year, that he added to his legal work the literary industry I have already described. It is to these years also that belong the vague traditions upon which a faint legend rather

than a history has grown. There was some talk of a marriage between himself and his cousin, Anais Deshorties.[1] The project was not pursued, and certainly neither here nor at any other time can you connect him with a romance. Even at the very end, when he felt that he was leaving the world and walked at sunset in Thermidor with Eleanor Duplay up the wooded hill of Passy, the woman with him was not near to him. The vague attraction of his voice and the false appeal which his over-sensitiveness produced led to this or that passage of sentiment, but—almost alone of the men of the Revolution—he brings in no interest of love.

These years, in every rare detail that survives, emphasise the absorption into one social class of which I have spoken. He never signs without the "de"; he addresses Carnot by that title on his reception into the Academy. His dogmatic liberalism spares the Churches, maintains the decencies, and is concealed by all the habits of the old rank which he has recovered. Ten men were present when—at the close of this period—he received the Duke of Guines as a guest of his literary society. He was careful to allude to "citizens" in his address, but the ten men who heard him were all noblesse—of the sword or the gown. In his daily life, too, he merged with the industrious but protected class which these accidents indicate. He woke at six, worked in his study till eight, pleased by the sound of birds. Then he would spend the ample care that fashion demanded upon his person. The barber came to shave and powder him; he drank his glass of milk and went out across the square to the courts. They rose at two, and when he had returned to the principal early meal that is still the custom of the north, he walked abroad a little; sometimes for the stiff ritual of his calls, more

[1] The daughter of his father's sister. She later married a lawyer of Arras, and died in 1847.

often alone. And these walks, in which his solitude followed that of his literary master, he would enshrine in amiable but unimportant prose. He arranged his papers for the evening, supped, worked again in his study for a while, and slept at ten. And these very common habits of his time and profession he coloured only by a meticulous regularity and by a curious self-absorption. He was by nature absent-minded; somewhat from shortness of sight but more from the bent of his temper; over-thoughtful in the street, even forgetful of immediate things and details; a little silent amid the conversation of his friends.

With all this he did not miss at all the general tide about him; he was ready, months before the States-General met, to address an audience as "the possible makers of a new world"; his written advice in two legal cases—one concerning the rights of Bastards, the other a Lettre de Cachet—are a little more certain, a little more forward even than the general average of the assertions and passages which announced the coming change.

He was, then, by his established repute, by the known bent of his politics, by his freedom from all entanglement and by the expository position he had acquired (in the district men already expected his pleadings and his essays), marked out for a place in the new politics. In the August of 1788 the news reached Arras that the States-General were to be summoned; he launched at once his pamphlet or manifesto: "An Appeal to the Artesian People."

This pamphlet, an octavo of some eighty pages, has a quality of immediate and practical application which was rare in the run of his appeals. It contains, of course, a certain excess of frigid oratory. That was not his alone: it was the time's. But it has also a certain detail of analysis; it expresses a number of

definite grievances peculiar to the province, and, what is more remarkable, it deals exactly with the historical origins of the peculiar complexity of jurisdiction and tenure under which Artois laboured. It meets and expects the practical arguments of opponents. It was bought and read immediately, and its edition was exhausted.[1] It made more sure what was already sure—his candidature; it placed him higher in the order of election than, for all his solid reputation, his youth might otherwise have permitted.

The decree fixing the nature of the elections and the number of the Commons appeared in January 1789. In March he issued, not a pamphlet, but a direct and personal declaration of his candidature. Moderate as it is, one can find in it the self-regard and the self-mirroring of '94—and it closes with this sentence, five years before its time: "The Supreme Being will hear my prayers. He knows their sincerity and their fervour. I can hope that He will fulfil them."

In Arras the election was complicated to a degree. I will not weary my readers with its recital. In the first general meeting he was chosen. In the second electoral college he was chosen again—the 13th out of 180 names. On the 26th of April, when the final choice of eight members of the Commons was made, he passed with some difficulty, the 5th upon the list, and his political career began.

It is not the details of such a confused machinery that interest history: it is the attitude of Robespierre during the last week of this trial. He seemed to have found an atmosphere and to have awakened. He spoke incessantly, eagerly, and well. He made himself the mouthpiece of a protest of the Commons against the

[1] I know of no original copy. In the form in which it may now be consulted, it has received many later additions from his pen.

privileged orders;[1] he helped to draw up the grievances of the surrounding parishes: he had found his trade.

That exceptional energy spent itself in success, but though exhausted in so few days it was typical of those rare occasions in the life before him, when sudden (or long-nourished but newly apparent) ambitions lifted him from one step to another in his career.

On the first of May the united deputies of the province met in the cathedral. On the morrow Robespierre went back into insignificance; but the coach was on the Paris road, and he knew that his stage was to be the world.

[1] This is but a conjecture, based upon an allusion to "a persistent and interrupting lawyer" among the Commons, in a contemporary letter of the Duc de Guines. The Duke was president of the Combined Electoral College of the Artois.

# CHAPTER III

## VERSAILLES

LATE in the afternoon of Monday, the third of May, the deputies of the three orders began to fill Versailles. With them life and an influence of crowds was pouring up the long valley, threatening the majestic Park, the dead order and magnificence of the three avenues, the formal trees, the silent regularity of the palace. Spring introduced this advent of ideas; the new leaves in Satory, the easy airs, the clear twilight of lengthening days mixed in with the promise of change; nothing stood certain, but everything was troubled with expectation and renewal. This ferment working France and the city had thrown out an essence—the Parliament. It was to discover in itself the quality of a vintage, to remember the oldest things in the soil and to create.

This force of many men turned corporate, this crowd which was like all France caught in a mirror, mingled with and passed through the throngs that Paris had sent up, curious or applauding, to the royal town, and Versailles added to them all the gardens of her wide roads. Eddies impeded the flowing of the streets; the German of the palace guard, the new political catchwords of the populace, the last epigram of the cynics surrounded the more famous as they were set down at their lodgings; faces that had already a vague reputation arrested the crowd. Mounier from the mountains, where the first protest had been read, half-drowned in the roar of the Romanche outside the hall; the long, hard visage of Siéyès, certain, dry as his pamphlets; the angry, great

head of Mirabeau. Through all this, among the very least of the new-comers, unknown in a mass of unknowns, Robespierre passed down with his few companions, to the cheap sign of the Fox in the Rue Sainte-Elizabeth.[1]

The little glories of Arras dropped off him into the distance; he was lonely, and content to be lonely. It seemed that in a new world so vast and so representative nothing could raise him from insignificance. In that new world he began, from the very outset of the debates, steadily and imperceptibly to rise. How? The contrast of his beginning and his end is so striking, and its comprehension so vital to his story, that, before telling of his first actions in the Parliament, I would state and examine the problem it involves.

Robespierre in the Artois, successful, narrow, confined to provincial destinies, and filling easily without the strain of high ambition or of unfulfilled capacities a place half inherited and wholly congenial, presented a definite figure. That career of local conventions and middling dignities, the best of what Arras could afford and as ample as the little circle of the town permitted, suited him, as did his careful, hardly fashionable clothes, or the pedantic accuracy in accent and grammar which often rises from the uneasy pride of a country town. His rigidity of conviction was indeed suitable for great scenes, but it was of its nature neither troubling as are enthusiasms, nor pushed from within by destiny as is a creative genius. Versailles could not find in him a forgotten principle to be revived, a new message to be given, nor a great act to be accomplished; and on that account, because his principal quality of faith accepted only what so many then agreed upon, and because of

[1] This street, somewhat lengthened in the modern town, has become the Rue Duplessis.

its very security and absoluteness, it is easy to imagine him, had the Revolution not called him from his Province, living to old age a small unfamous life, to be enshrined later in a biography of local worthies. In rehabilitating the legal reputation of his family, and in leaving a decent tradition to the freehold in the Rue des Rapporteurs, he would have done enough and have been thoroughly himself.

At home, therefore, he is an explicable man. Nor will it prove impossible, as I hope this book will show, to find a just place for him in his later domination, when his name had become a sign in Europe, and was used currently throughout France as the token of the Revolution.

But if the origins of his career present no problem, and if even his latter tragedy is fitted to its time, there lies between them a link that has constantly disturbed the calculations of historians. For the first twelve months of the Parliament, without interruption or perceptible date of origin, his influence steadily increased from a nonentity to a kind of fame, until by 1790 it was clearly seen that he might pass from that mere fame onwards to the position of a master. The enormous disturbance that wholly recast the society of his country seemed to preserve for him some similar environment from which he derived the nourishment of his increase, and he grew continually in the same soil. What was there in 1789 to indicate its presence? Into what could the unknown and somewhat paltry figure strike root at Versailles in the first brilliant months of the States-General, where unanimity of purpose impressed six hundred men, and was led by the best talent of the nation? where wit and generosity and experience, coupled with all the self-satisfaction of an exclusive culture and of protected wealth, formed an area for such a wide mind as Mirabeau's, and seemed repugnant at

once to the incessant dogmatism of Robespierre's temper and to the species of idolatry upon which he was later to depend.

A Picard, young without youth, very middle-class for his pretensions, wearying with his reiterations the chance few that met him, mediocre in literary ability though touched by literary ambition; capable, apparently, of little but affirmations (and these delivered in a voice of no great strength, read through great spectacles from manuscripts that desired, but were rarely permitted, to be interminable), he was but a lost unit among the hundreds whose rallying points were the trained advocacy of Cazalès, the laconic summaries of Siéyès, the wit of Talleyrand, the loud facility of Maury, the proper liberal breadth of Lafayette, the Irish energy of poor Lally,[1] the knowledge of men that added distinction to the falsity of the Archbishop of Aix, the early enthusiasms of Barnave, and the dominating genius of Mirabeau. It is no wonder that he was lost in such a summary of France and that, had we nothing of the later time, he would remain all but unknown.

The obscure, but firm position which, in spite of his insignificance, he took up for himself at this outset of the Revolution, the emplacement where he could repose, and upon which was firmly planted the ladder of his rise, lay in a little group whose place in the States-General, the memoirs of fashionable contemporaries have minimised, and which history therefore tends to take too little into account. The Assembly, coalesced by an accident, rejecting by an instinct common to all French deliberations the spirit of party (there were no political inheritances to preserve nor highly salaried posts to be obtained), turned, not to registering the decrees of a

[1] It must have been Lally's son that died, an old man, some six years ago, in Soho. Poor and quite alone. Supported by the charity of the French Hospital.

government, but to the framing of true decisions that were the fruit of living debates; and it was led by several and independent orators. To the extreme left, bearing with them the future fortunes of the Reform, the Garats, Volneys, St. Etiennes, Grégoires, Barnaves—men whose very names later stand separate and hostile—afforded at that moment a solid nucleus round which the principles of 1789 could crystallise and take on form. This atmosphere of an uncompromising theory was not so much the most favourable, it was rather the only, centre of action for a man destined to be a leader in the later Revolution. Save these, no organic part of the Assembly survived; rare individuals, disunited, "lived," and came at last to be saved by Robespierre in '93 and in Thermidor to manage his death. They were but spectators; the actors of the change were the extremists of '89.

It may be asked how names, not yet famous, some of them absolutely unknown, could find in an obscure corner of that great Parliament the framing necessary to their future renown and power; the answer lies in considering the nature of leadership in war rather than the ordinary development of political life. The rapid succession of the Revolution, each phase introduced by arms, approaches much more nearly, in what may be called "the physics" of its development, to a campaign than to a political reform. Therefore the element inseparable from a prolonged struggle—an element sometimes absent in the defeated camp but always present upon the side that will ultimately be victorious—appeared among the revolutionary leaders; unknown or untried men, many even that had seemed incapable of sound general judgment, yet having in them an intimate sympathy with the *terrain* and with the character of the war, become of themselves the successful generals at its close.

Now Robespierre was in no sense such a leader, but his

reiteration of the Rousseauan theory threw him at once among them, and the band in which he moved, himself the least regarded, was altogether composed of such men. They went on ahead of the Revolution, and as the great laws were one by one decreed, these laws did but fill up formulæ which the extremists were remembered to have pronounced. A fatality of success distinguished such minorities throughout the movement. They already held as a faith defined what France as yet held only vaguely by instinct: they could not fail to become the depositories of the creed. So the Mountain in 1792 (hated for September, and repulsive to the Plain), yet acquired the mastery of the Convention. So, earlier, in 1791 the Girondins of the Legislative, ridiculed a little for their idealism, vain and at first defeated, yet made the policy of the nation and accelerated the war. So here at the outset, in 1789, the weak Left were to dictate to a half-unwilling Assembly principles which the event of every struggle confirmed.

They were certain; and the tension of that certainty of theirs became like a cord stretched to a special note; when the note was sounded France without responded in harmony. Faith, then, proved the strongest thing; and the doubts of the pedants, the reluctant hypocrisy of the Right, the invective of the last of the wits broke against it. This was the gate by which Robespierre came in.

On the 4th of May, in a scene that a dozen relations have rendered memorable, the States-General met in the Church of Our Lady for the Veni Creator, and filed out in order through the silent crowd to hear the Mass of the Holy Ghost at St. Louis. Dressed in the black court suit that was uniform to the whole 600 Commons, in his sword and his silk cape, Robespierre, mixed with a pomp and ritual that were congenial to him, entered upon the career of debate which was

to become his whole being. His mind that knew no attachment to the theatrical, and had but little appreciation of the dramatic, yet had, in common with that of every mystic, a sense of symbolism and a need for externals. The scene in St. Louis, the liberal and even startling sermon of the Bishop of Nancy, the shock of the public applause, confirmed whatever imagination he had framed in Arras of the rôle of the States-General. The vigorous origins that dignified the march of the Commons into history, the unanimity that was their earliest character, and the special form that their demand obtained, provided his introduction to public life; and his nature, which was not devoid of timidity, and which was easily convinced of isolation, received every encouragement to action when he found the Third Estate so imbued with his Rousseau as to proclaim a theoretic right on the second day of its session, and to insist above all things upon a name: they would sit in one house with the nobility and clergy; they would depend only on the absolute mandate of the whole nation; they demanded the title of National Assembly.[1]

Such encouragement, then, moved him to action. What form did that action take? If he succeeded in launching himself into a world that knew nothing of him and desired but little acquaintance with the dryness of chance provincials, it was by an extreme assiduity. So negligible was his person, and so ineffective his method of address at this date and with such an audience, that one discovers the nature of his activity only by putting together very various and meagre testimonies. For months the half-official *Moniteur* does not mention his name; for half a year, even Barrère with his thousands of careful notes, misspells it; upon more than

[1] The term "National Assembly" was not, as has been pretended, new or irregular. It had, indeed, no historical precedent, but it had been, for five months before the Parliament met, the common phrase by which it was described, even in the letters of the court.

one occasion he is "Mr. X——," and his generalisations are sometimes cut short in the reports by an ignoble "&c."

The States-General had not been sitting eight days when the Commons heard for the first time the accurate articulation and the weak but carrying voice which were destined to become a vehicle of command and to assume the power of the Republic.

It was on Tuesday, the twelfth of May, that he went up into the Tribune to suggest an amendment to the motion of Rabaut St. Etienne, who, in the general demand that was rising for the adhesion of the nobility and the clergy, and the unity of the Assembly, had attempted conciliation and had urged the sending of a deputation to confer with the two privileged orders and to attempt their conversion. The amendment for which Robespierre pleaded and which he laid on the table in form, was in itself insignificant; partly from the uncertainty of the procedure, partly because its author was unknown, the amendment was not even put, but it is worthy of notice not only as his first political act, but because it exhibits a character which, for all his phrasing, was a principal part of his later ascendency. He had the touch of assemblies; he grasped with rapidity their general spirit, distinguished it from its individual components, saw where the avenues of persuasion lay, and had an instinct how Parliaments might be led and how controlled. In this amendment he had advised a double action consonant to the separate characters of the two houses in question. To the clergy, largely elected in opposition to the hierarchy, and full of the new enthusiasm, he proposed an appeal; to the nobles, whose majority he had justly weighed, he would have sent nothing but a formal summons. It would certainly be refused, but it would constitute an act and be of record.[1]

[1] This, his first speech, we should know nothing of from the papers. He spoke late in the debate, and his name was not yet known. We hear

To see in this amendment an act of forensic judgment it is not necessary to depend upon the doubtful appreciations we may form to-day. The masterly grasp of Mirabeau fixed upon Robespierre's suggestion; he may have passed the sentence so commonly attributed to him and declared that the young lawyer from Artois "would go far, for he believed all he said"; it is certain that on this day (the first in which Mirabeau had so much as heard of Robespierre) he adopted the proposal, and the motion that Mirabeau brought forward upon the following Monday, the 18th, was in substance Robespierre's own.

The incident was the first example of a quality I have already described. Things that were very close to him he could thus judge with accuracy, especially if they had to do with the play of a deliberative assembly, but in proportion as they were distant from his immediate surroundings and foreign to the nature of debate he lost his hold upon them. The close of his life will show his ignorance of the provinces in his hesitation to appeal to them; of Paris in his law of the 22nd Prairial; of the campaigns in his arrest of Hoche and suspicions of Carnot, and especially of Foreign Affairs in his crude abandonment of the intricate and well-organised scheme that Danton had conceived in 1793.

Had the work of the Constituent Assembly proceeded in a social medium more lethargic than that of France, and had an incomplete and dangerous reform worked itself out amidst the commonplace self-sufficiency of the wealthy; had that compromise, which so many have since desired, been established; had the liberal nobility persuaded the squires, or had the commons discovered the perils of the ideal, Robespierre would have moved securely and low down in a society that was his own: his name

of it only in his own letter to Buissart at Arras, written on the 24th of May.

gradually assuming so much importance as to be correctly spelt in the newspapers and his person becoming as well known in drawing-rooms as that of a hundred others. Ridiculed somewhat for his intense and narrow creed, treated impatiently for dogmatism and self-repetition, he would yet have formed a useful member of the committee to which he was attached, he would have returned to Arras full of little honours for the provincial town to magnify, and would have found his life well content in a society where order should have been established upon a comfortable and gradual decline of power.

He was not of those who were then possessed with the first driving energy of the new time, and it was with frigidity and a slight astonishment that he saw the great summer of '89 riot past him. In his social exactitude, his phrases and his reticence, he was still the old régime provincial I have described, and that other part of him, the little shrine wherein he kept his principles as hard as diamonds, did nothing for him in the interval between the first orderly meeting of the States-General and the days—nearly a year after—when Paris began to take up an articulate creed of reform. Once that desire was felt in the capital it was of necessity that this man, whose peculiar quality it was to be the exponent of one idea, should fill more and more the place reserved to the functionaries of a creed, until at last a sharp moment of fanaticism seemed to promise him a complete mastery because he had always kept the faith. But of that creative passion which was to generous minds the principal gift of the Revolution he felt as yet no breath, and even later, when he had become a leader, it was long his single service to enunciate and define as though no storm blew.

His history, therefore, in a time whose every act merits the detailed attention of Europe—for in that summer our new life was founded—is but the history of an isolated

mind. The great days that the Revolt drove like a charioteer, left him silent; and amid all the reputations, some that came suddenly out of the earth, and some that fell as suddenly into contempt or nothingness, his alone stood still, unmade and unendangered. He grew to be somewhat noticed as a useful member of the Left; and if one gathers what little evidence remains of his interior life during the whirlpool of June and July, one finds only set phrases, the expected content in political success, a little astonishment, and here and there an example of that close but ill-selecting observation [1] which was the foil to his perpetual abstraction, and to his common errors of judgment. He spoke not unfrequently, always as uncertain of his position before the Assembly as he was certain of his thesis; he was listened to very carelessly, and reported more carelessly still.

Once, indeed, during the whole two months he excited some general attention and applause when he replied with rhetoric of unusual strength to the Archbishop of Aix, who had come, holding a piece of black bread, to beg a grant from the Commons for the poor, but who desired only to prolong the quarrel of the orders till an armed reaction might reconquer privilege.

"You are the minister of a sublime religion which has poverty at its foundations . . . go and tell your colleagues that they need delay the Commons no longer with the affectation of urgency . . . for your canons permit you to sell the very vessels of the altar in the cause of the poor; you have no need of such resources. You have but to dismiss your liveries, and to sell your coaches, and to empty your palaces somewhat; you will find ample material for largesse."

The style was inspired by Mirabeau, and though such

[1] Thus this (in his letter of the 24th) on Target: " . . . Every one was on tip-toe to hear him, with his great reputation. He gave vent to a number of commonplaces, which he very much emphasised, and we soon saw that he was a greatly overrated man."

passages were found more frequently in his speeches as the Revolution advanced, they remained something exotic to the literary flavour of his work. Had he been fitted to achieve, or had he learnt that spontaneity which made the first reputations of '89, he would have taken his place far more rapidly before the Assembly and the caste that still governed the nation: a caste to which in part he belonged. But he would also have fallen into the struggle of violent parties, and have been lost very early under the name of some faction. He would not have advanced by that kind of subterranean way of his, unmolested, and emerging at last into a secure popularity, above the arena.

He did indeed, in the end of May, take a step calculated to secure his position with his party. The province of Brittany that is always the evening or the morning star of France, that preserved and organised the national spirit of Gaul when Rome fell, that alone determinedly opposed the unity of the middle ages, that is now proud of a picturesque isolation, was then a forerunner of the Revolution. Its deputies of the Commons and most of its clergy[1] joined to form a society that was at Versailles the only definite and well-arranged group of radicals: meeting first in the vault, later on the first floor[2] of the Café Amaury at the corner of the Rue de la Pompe and the main road to St. Cloud. The Left in general saw the tactical advantage of such an organisation; Mirabeau, Barnave, Grégoire, obtained admission, until at last in June, with close upon two hundred members, who met before each debate and drew up their

[1] The noblesse of Brittany had taken the singular resolution of boycotting the States-General. They sat at home and solemnly ratified or rejected its decrees.

[2] At least that is the only way in which we can reconcile the "Souterrain" of Montjoie (ii. 121), the "Cavern" of Dumont, and the detailed account that an eye-witness (M. Augé) gave to M. Thénard (who communicated it to Aulard) of the meeting in the first floor. M. Augé remembered and preserved the chair of Robespierre.

programme, they were easily the leaders of the Assembly. This "Brutus club" Robespierre of course joined. But he was not content with joining only. He was careful to be among its earliest arrivals, he was present at its least-attended meetings, and he thus gave evidence of that instinct (for it was instinct rather than plan) whereby he recognised the immense force which such caucuses, disciplined and exterior to the main deliberative body, exercise in politics. Such later, and with a power irresistibly increased, were the Jacobins.

For the rest, he was still the minor official lost in the general mass of the Assembly. His voice was not heard on the day when the decisive step was taken, and when Siéyès proposed and carried his last appeal to the clergy and the nobility. When a week later the Commons took the name of National Assembly, on the 12th of June, and began by that illegality the triumph of ordered law, he was equally silent. Whether or no the religious leaning of his character, and the love of ceremony that was in it led him with Bailly to the procession of the Corpus Christi, remains unknown; we know that he did not vote for the observation of the Feast. On that famous Saturday, two days after, when the six hundred deputies stood in the rain before the locked and guarded door of their hall, he was but an insignificant point of the gathering, catching from the rumours that reached its further ranks the purport of the insult that the king had offered them. He went in with them all across the streaming pavement, and under the dull sky to the Tennis Court in the Rue St. François; he took, as others did, the oath to give France a constitution, and signed the roll with the rest. But all that increasing furnace did not reach his heart or consume him, for there was nothing in his mind inflammable, and David was inspired by a later time when he drew him in that scene with two hands upon his breast "as though he had two hearts

for liberty." He must have stood at the foot of the table whence Bailly dictated the vow, as reserved and apart as he had remained in the Assembly; seeing in that bare and memorable hall the scene of nothing more than a natural political success. He assisted, silent as ever, at the Royal Session of the following Tuesday, and heard stubbornly, like any other of the Parliament, the last vigorous pronouncement of the French Crown. He remained with the deserted Commons at its close and witnessed Mirabeau's gesture of defiance to De Brézé, and the angry repartee, which, like the majority of historical phrases, has become permanent under an altered form.[1] Five days later the Commons had been joined by the greater part of the clergy, and by that liberal nobility of which Robespierre had himself given to a friend so inadequate a description.[2]

This crisis in the history of the National Assembly renewed the opportunities in which he could appear; it was the moment for deputations between the Commons and the recalcitrants of the two orders, and the Commons, strengthened in their revolt against the Crown by the adhesion of so many clergy and of a few great lords, rapidly assumed an assured position. When Mirabeau's proposal to send a committee to treat with the king had passed, Robespierre, because he already seemed to represent a group of the extreme Left, was chosen to join it with Mirabeau himself, Pétion, Buzot, and the rest of the twelve. It was on Friday, the 10th of July, that the committee or deputation attended at the palace to urge the king to yield. We have no record of how this

[1] Mirabeau's own words—at least as he himself relates them in his thirteenth letter to his constituents—are much tamer than the famous "we are here by the will of the people." They are longer, and end with ". . . then you must ask for the employment of force, for we shall not leave our places save under the pressure of bayonets."

[2] In the letter of the 24th of May. "Reasonable men, in very small number, and even they not exempt from the prejudices of their class. . . ." Moreover, he confounds Lafayette and the Duc d'Orleans in one batch

second personal interview with the king, whom he had not addressed since the speech-day at Louis-le-Grand, affected Robespierre;[1] but we know that the king's reply was a declaration of war against the Assembly. On the morrow Necker was dismissed, and with the loss of that self-sufficient banker, the Parliament at Versailles, and, what was of greater moment, the liberal opinion of Paris, knew that the king had abandoned the respectable solutions of half-foreign philosophers, had ignored the tide of France, and had taken refuge with the soldiers. He had determined to appeal to the swords around him, to his nobility, and to the emblazoned traditions that still hang like a vain and antique ornament upon western society. But the result of the conflict neither the Assembly, nor the Crown, nor the nobility could guess; a real France, full of the old epics, of laughter, and of tragedy, rose up and enthroned herself and dwarfed them all.

All the world knows what followed the dismissal of Necker: Camille Desmoulins running into the garden of the Palais Royal with the news, astonishing and rousing the Sunday morning crowd; the Monday spent in arms; next day, the 14th of July, the fall of the Bastille and the capitulation of the Court.

Robespierre was not among the hundred deputies that went to Paris on the 15th at the instance of the king, with Bailly at their head, and found the town "like a wood of muskets," but he was appointed to be one of the second hundred that accompanied the king the next day, and that saw him receive at the Poissy gate the keys that Henry IV. had accepted, when, two hundred years before, there had been founded that splendid power which was now stripped even of its externals. He collected with care the signs of the popular feeling,

[1] In a second letter of his (written on July 23rd) one might expect some description of his feelings at the palace, but there is only a commonplace denunciation of the intrigues of the Court against the Assembly.

noted the cheers for the nation as the king passed into the Hôtel de Ville, for the Crown as he came out of it with the national cockade. Then for the rest of the week, when the greater part of his colleagues had returned to Versailles, he passed with curiosity rather than enthusiasm over the sites which the struggle had rendered famous, and heard for the first time the applause of the street; for every deputy of the Commons was deified at that moment.[1]

With that experience, or rather with his return to Versailles and the deputies six days later, closes the first stage of his entry into public life. It had been passed in a succession of scenes, each throbbing up higher as water throbs with a rising energy from an open sluice, until at last the old society in one day and night was overwhelmed. He had come to the time when the first emigrants began their fatal treason, when Condé had passed the frontier, and when the king's younger brother, the Comte d'Artois, had fled in company with that family of Polignac which was later to ruin him and his house. But all that drama had passed him by and left him still similar to himself, secure in the narrow confines of his exact intelligence, and quite untouched by passion.

We have a picture of his mind during those two months, not only in the brief reports of his rare speeches, but in two letters which he wrote to a friend in Arras, the one at the close of May, the other just at the point we have reached, when he re-entered Versailles after his visit to Paris on the fall of the Bastille. In both, written under what should have been such different conditions of emotion, the same paleness of thought, the same absolute phrases are to be discovered; the same mixture of sound general appreciations and astonishingly false particular judgments. He sees that Mounier and Target cannot last, but on the same page he calls Mirabeau

[1] All this is in his letter of the 23rd to Buissart.

"nul," and gravely prophesies that his position will be destroyed by the evil effect of his reputed morals. He describes with enthusiasm the king coming bareheaded to the Assembly to announce the renunciation of his former claims on hearing of the fall of the Bastille; he puts some energy and much acuteness into his picture of the king's entry into Paris. But the enthusiasm, the energy, and the detail all express themselves in phrases of a false ring. "Tyranny," "despotisms," and all the simple extremes do service for the complexity of the royal claim and tradition. The words lack stuff; he can find no epithet for the conquered Bastille but "séjour delicieux," and the commonplace is the foundation of the whole: for all the world like a sermon or a leading article. The scaffolding of the old world had given way with a crash; the dust of the ruin still hung in the air, and the noise of it was rolling out to the kings beyond the Rhine and the Channel when this slight and rather dapper lawyer, erect and often thinly smiling, was hurrying, full of an amiable curiosity, through an armed Paris, with national guards to show him the lions, and gratified by the occasional applause of passers-by, who noticed a deputy, but did not yet know so much as his name. Underneath this grotesquely petty surface, and fixed into this common spirit, there lay the certitudes upon whose display the whole people would one day insist, as upon relics or gems, till they came to worship the man who always wore them as the unique furniture of his mind.

The Versailles and the Assembly which he found on his return from Paris were new. August and September were an origin; all the entanglement of existing and legal privilege had been cut, and the great doubt as to whether a reform would be possible or no was solved. The Revolution had begun; it was in order; it was the Law. To arrest it a counter-stroke, itself illegal and

violent, would be needed, and the Crown had partly lost the principal resource for such a counter-plan—I mean the Administration, which in countries long organised as bureaucracies is a fine net holding in all the state. The Administration where it was new (as in the municipalities), owed its life directly or indirectly to the Assembly; where it was old (as in the courts of law), tended to admit its authority. There was indeed a violent opposition to the majority in the now united Parliament, but there was no open opposition to the existence of such a Parliament; unless indeed we count that splendid scatter-brain who daily paced up and down his solitary hour in the empty hall that had been the House of the nobles, and thus made act and record that there were still Lords in the constitution.

Now therefore, that the way to remodelling France was open, there arose for reasoning men a necessity of definition: renunciations and affirmations to baptize democracy, and the recital of a creed which is the first business of conviction if it is to be practical and to build upon a sure design. With every formula an institution would be born, but the new things rose out of the idea and were seen clearly in the mind before they assumed words and passed on from phrases to reality. In such a sequence the function of Robespierre was clear and his position at once enhanced and defined. He did not rise above the obscurity of the first sessions, nor did he outdistance as yet any of the lesser competitors for popularity and fame; the medium of clamour was still uncongenial to his destiny and temper. But it will often be observed in the working of deliberative assemblies that with the entry of a special point into the discussion an unknown authority is revealed. He may carry but little weight, yet he cannot but be heard since he has the matter by heart and is ready upon every turn of argument; in spite of ridicule and indifference his name

cannot fail to pierce if only by the frequency of its repetition. Here the matter of debate was the new theory of society, and in that Robespierre, full of connected dogmas, was a specialist in the extreme. The memory of Rousseau presided always in that hall, and here a kind of shrivelled Rousseau, desiccate and incapable of development, but built of the elements of the Rousseauan Book, appeared with a living voice.

There were present in France during the height of that summer, through its failing harvest, and with the turn of autumn when the vintage was ready, two great movements side by side. The first of these was an anarchy in the countrysides; mere humanity going forward between the extinction of the old faint light and the rare dawn. The second was the mind moving over the face of such waters; the Assembly, passing with the rapidity of pure thought from definition to organisation and casting decrees that only after years of warfare and the innumerable moulding accidents of a century of experience have become the unquestioned laws of the modern state.

Robespierre lived in this mind, hearing nothing of the loud storm in France, and heeding only the words of a debate; but to appreciate at once his meagre quality of insistence, the temper of those to whom it was addressed, and the rising populace who later lifted him upon their shoulders, it is necessary to see the Parliament lit up by the burning of title-deeds and manors, chorused by the noise of the new district clubs in Paris, calling its orders over the roar of the furnace and doing everything to the rising and falling of flames. Into the picture of that conflagration, though it gave all its meaning to the time, I cannot enter; it is the business of this book to examine not the Revolution, nor even the Parliaments, but a mind isolated and feeding inwardly upon itself.

It would be tedious and of little purpose to recount

every instance of his interference in the debates that affirmed the rights of the citizen, that laid the foundations of the Constitution and that destroyed the shell of the old régime. He combated Lally's vague and repressive motion of the 20th of July, proposed under the terror of the provincial riots; he combated it again when on the 23rd the Assembly passed it in the panic that followed the lynching of old Foulon in the Place de Grève. A month later he defended the four burghers of Marienburg whom Esterhazy had arrested of his own authority. Though his speech is lost he was one of the many who opposed the word "established" in connection with public worship in the Constitution. At the close of August he did two things very typical of his abstractions. First he defined a necessary liberty for the Press in terms that showed how completely the organic aspect of the State escaped him, and how thoroughly he was wrapped up in the conceptions of individual contract; for he proposed the abolition of all save private prosecution for libel. He saw that a citizen could have a claim; he did not see how the more general evil of false news or of the corruption of morals by a press in the control of a few might prove the principal menace to the very form of society which the Revolution was launching upon Europe. Secondly, he wrangled hard for a word in connection with the right of the nation to tax itself, thinking that with the phrase, "consenting to the budget," all was lost, and with the phrase, "establishing the revenue," all was saved. Supported by the bulk of the Left his first proposition passed; his second helped to modify the cause in question. He was in all this but one amid innumerable speakers, but it is pertinent to know that at this moment, and in connection with the Press law, Mirabeau, who had watched and followed his action from the opening of the States-General, who was his colleague at the Breton

Club, and who had, presumably, put him among the Deputies of the 10th of July, came closely into touch with him and helped him into fame.

It stood to reason that he would support his friend Lepelletier de St. Fargeau in his demand for an annual parliament, and that he would denounce as a monstrosity the royal power to veto a bill. There were occasions when the Assembly saw in him nothing but unreasonable logic incarnate, and refused to listen. Whether it was he who cried out "dues, not rights" during the "orgy" of the 4th of August when the nobles were throwing all their feudal privileges by the board, is not certain. But he spoke with an approach to violence when, six weeks later, the King hesitated to promulgate the abolition of those privileges, and in the first days of October, just before Paris stormed the Court, he was still protesting against the continued reluctance which Louis showed in signing the Declaration of Rights.

Thus whenever some obstacle appeared to the facile deductions of his politics, or some negation of their absolute verity was heard, he hurried to the Tribune. Thus, also, he was continually absent from it when the detailed work and curious interests of that prodigious Reform were the issue. To the end detail missed his mind and fact disturbed it. But there are three occasions very well worth observing, because they form an exception to his earlier and more natural conduct, and because they are the origins of that temptation which he was to feel towards the crowd; the first inconsistencies and the first taste of idolatry that warmed and enlarged whatsoever little in him could be enlarged or warmed. This temptation when he yielded to it was to make him more than a logician. It magnified his shadow till that shadow enveloped the multitudinous strength of Paris itself.

The occasion of the first of these inconsistent de-

partures was when he insisted on the right of search and on the opening of the private letters which Castelnau was caught bearing (ten days after the Bastille) from the Court to the King's emigrant brother. The Right quoted Pompey burning the letters to Sertorius; and Robespierre, with an outburst half demagogic and certainly divorced from his native pedantry, thrust into his speech: "What care I for Cæsar or Pompey?" The second was his demand that poor Besenval, who had but obeyed his orders and taken command of the garrison of Paris before the revolt, should be detained in spite of the municipality's order for his enlargement. It is true he quoted legality, saying that the municipality was not there to arrest or to release; they were not a court of justice. But his motive in speaking was not legality; it was that touch of the desire to lead and to appeal which was beginning to work in him. He saw a vision of the people moving.

The third step in his original development forms so sharp a climax in the history of the Revolution and of his own life, that it merits an ampler attention.

It was autumn. The feudal dues and the antique parochial government had gone; they had not been replaced. Forced labour had gone still earlier; the roads lay unmended. The provincial tariffs were abolished in principle, they were thought abolished in fact; this popular conception caused but longer wrangles and delays at the custom-houses of the provincial barriers. Anarchy multiplied that friction in exchange which had been the curse of the old régime; the harvest, barely sufficient in amount, reaped by men uncertain of their market, distributed over broken roads and open to the passing mobs of the Great Fear, failed the towns.

To the fixed revolutionary purpose with which Paris had inflamed its soul there was added that great spur of the soul—hunger. The young men and women fasting

saw more than the lawyers knew; they saw the wide descent to '93, and bread and equality made a mixed desire. With the first days of October the mass of Paris was set in motion by the folly of the Court. The guards and the regiment of Flanders had sat at table on the stage of the theatre in the palace. The white cockade had been kissed and worn and baptized in the wine of two nights; and a noble song, a separate thing in the musical frivolity of the time, had touched that nerve of loyalty which is the life of soldiers. There were confounded in this mad hope and in this chivalric treason, nobles merely selfish, the Queen merely Hapsburg,—perhaps also terrified for and determined on preserving the future power of her child; regiments of the French blood, foreign mercenaries, and the King himself had consented. That it was an armed menace to the Assembly and hence to Paris and to the Revolution was not contested. Therefore the enthusiasm and high courage which marked the small garrison of the palace did but increase the anger of the nation and of the Parliament, for it gave to this forlorn hope an appearance of energy and of remote success.

On Monday the 5th of October a driving storm broke over Paris. Spontaneously, at the noise of a drum snatched up, the streets filled with women and a strength of four battalions, half an army corps, eight, ten thousand grotesquely armed, bareheaded, singing, pushed their faces against the wild rain and surged up the half-impassable valley road with a vague but terrible object in Versailles. Food, an equal right, the breaking of the foreign pride in arms, but, more than all, that great afflatus which makes of single souls in such moments the parts and organs of a whole people, pushed them on against the cold aud the intolerable gale. At their head, gaunt, dry-eyed and full of the future, Maillard went, black and leading. Behind them

followed a great host of struggling men dragging two guns by lanyards and hauling on to the same unknown. On the further side of the tempest they were marching to the Republic and the great wars.

It was when the river had found an estuary and when this unnumbered energy had enlarged upon the convergence of the avenues in the great space before the palace that Maillard, organiser and voice, chose out twelve women and went into the hall of the Assembly. Outside the parliament house was a perpetual noise like the sea in easy weather; the rain beat on their windows, the mob moved and circled with a continuous trampling and a general voice. Within there was the customary order, and, at the entry of Maillard and his twelve mothers, silence.

Very tall, long-visaged, pale, all dressed in close black serge with no white at his wrists or neck, splashed with the mud of twelve violent miles and dripping with the storm, this executioner's figure looked with eyes over-bright at the Tribune from which there was expected freedom and sufficient food for men. He then saw there, short, contained, erect, the cold, small face, the neat and careful habit, the new expectancy of Robespierre, who answered the complaint of the hungry by demanding an inquiry, by confirming the popular dread of secret plots against the city, and who spoke in that extreme moment for the extreme men of his kind. They had been thought mere lawyers over-particular for exactitude, they were now discovered to be the only hand which the Parliament could reach out to the people.

His voice, that had something in it hard and imperfect, yet also was distinct, and in that moment he used the modulations which can play upon a phrase. His eyes, that were weak, found it possible in this high moment to be direct and unveiled. The little committee of the populace and their leader, older and more terrible by

many years than his own youth, heard delighted the enunciation of their own policy; they had received a vigorous support from the Left and had savoured the silent acquiescence of the great hall. They were conducted and went out in silence.

Thus Robespierre first touched a thing that never wholly possessed him and yet changed his exact course, followed him in spite of himself and at last threw him down from a high false place: power.

The days of October did not only bring him face to face for the first time with the people, nor did they only reveal to him and them for the first time the unconscious tribunate within him. They also dropped him, who had been lost on the periphery of Versailles, down into the centre of Paris.

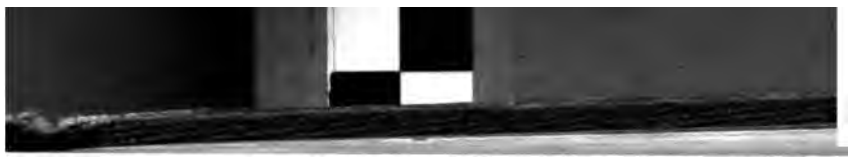
When the palace had been entered and when after the hungry night the violence of the morning had compelled the Court to follow down to the capital, the capture of the King whom the populace thus brought with them through the continuing rain was but a part of their achievement. They brought also the oratory and the metaphysics of the Assembly to the middle place where the history and therefore the stuff and power of France resided. The orators addressed an audience worthy of them, so that they caught substance from the complexity of the crowds; the metaphysicians found their formulæ turned to a gospel, because the people are the makers of religion. Versailles stood upon a monotonous unfruitful century of splendour, symmetry and mechanical decay. It was a violent artifice run up by mere wealth suddenly in a forest. Paris was fifteen hundred years; a dense soil of dead things transformed and fermenting, an infinite potentiality of production. At Versailles there was not an inch of Gothic, a bare corner of the Renaissance; very little even of that earnest, grotesque and learned seventeenth century, which is a

battlefield and is therefore alive. All in its architecture was the dead order of the younger Mansard and the official last of Gabriel, nor was there anything in harmony to respond to the enthusiasm of the attack or to the chivalry of the defence. But in Paris if the Assembly challenged the Christian hierarchy, Julian presided at the council; if they looked for a civic defence Philip the Conqueror enrolled the bourgeois guard; if the mob rose they were joined from all the narrow streets by the shadows of a hundred leaders; if the nobility remembered at last that the sword made a difference, the eldest son of the Plantagenets stirred in the earth of Notre Dame.

Paris was ready for the highest energies, straining like a runner at the crease, therefore when the few last days of lonely debate at Versailles were over and when the Assembly had met in the archbishop's palace on the Island of the Cité, waiting for the riding-school to be prepared, everything was ready for the ultimate entry of Danton, and the first stone of the Commune had been laid.

It is evident that there was no immediate part for Robespierre in the new life that this meeting of the Parliament and the capital aroused, for he was not of the kind who renew their power from without, or in whom sudden accidents and friction light up genius. Nevertheless, when he was given to Paris by the chance of October, a road was opened to him, for in Paris there awaited him a world that could comprehend him: in Versailles he had been utterly alone.

Versailles had neglected and silenced a man sufficiently silenced and neglected by nature. He was a gentleman, and was seen in the drawing-rooms, especially in those of that half-noble set which played with theories. But save perhaps a note of decent ridicule, what could he add to them? The rich, the world over, have one appetite, which is for the sensation of novelty. He





could give them nothing but phrases of which the very servants at their tables were tired. Perhaps, now and again the extravagance of his complete deductions might startle some one hearer into a momentary interest, but his conventional precision and all that rigid ill-ease which marks the self-respecting provincial was so much weight dragging him down into obscurity. There was no populace, no middle class, only the awful and repeated mediocrity of display, of superior mind and of patronage in the smart, the intellectual and the liberal aristocracy: three names for one thing. But in Paris, he that never breathed largely, at least could breathe. In Paris was a populace of whom he knew little, and who knew nothing of him, but who made him an idea because he made an idea of them; and, above all, in Paris there was that professional middle class which was fitted with exactitude to his expression, which had awaited hungrily and which received with gratitude the tenacious repetition of truth that was his special function. To one it was the pleasure of following out strict logic, to another it was the pleasure of hearing affirmed and defined what he had long held in the vague; to all it was the acceptation of a well-comprehended equal whose very limitations were the virtues their rank admired.

In Versailles it was a little ridiculous to lodge away down at the sign of the Fox, and to boast that four farmers sat at table with one. In Paris a man might lodge on the third floor of the Rue Saintonge, and have all the world asking him to dinner; it was but an address. The general life and the real interests of a capital released his pride from a daily fret, and left him free to his theories.

The six months that follow the entry of the Assembly into Paris form a very natural division in the life of Robespierre and are, at least, sufficiently marked out in the general history of the Revolution to be treated as

a whole. The deputies met in the great Hall of the Archévéché on the 12th of October 1789; at the close of March 1790 Robespierre was elected president of the Jacobins.[1]

With that word "Jacobins" the key to his career is in one's hand; for just what he lacked, and would have continued to lack in the Parliament, that he found and increased in the famous society which seemed later half-identified with his name, and which gave him a hold over all France. If he was more mentioned in the papers, more recognised by the Court, and of some little more influence in the national debates, it was because he came to every effort with the armour that the Jacobins were forging for him; because, also, if he was checked (as he was for ever being checked), the Jacobins formed a base for him and a fortress of retreat.

What was the nature of this society? How could it lend such power to a man? Whence came the great rapidity of its growth, and why was it suited to him in especial? It was the new theory organised like an army; it was by its restricted room and numbers suited to an individual; it expanded later because it was the one mode in which the resistance of the people to reaction could mould itself throughout the country. It was not in the Assembly but in the club that Robespierre opened his door on fame, and if we are to know Robespierre, it is more important to comprehend this society than any other part of all that made up the Revolution, and though I leave an examination of its activity and character to a later chapter and to a period when it controlled France, I must here admit a note upon its origin.

In some way, upon which authorities have differed,

[1] It is remarkable that in the "Histoire des Jacobins" this fact is omitted. Indeed, in the imperfect list of the first presidents of the club, M. Aulard, having drawn it up from signed documents only, leaves out the month of April 1790 altogether. The evidence of his presidency is contained in a third letter to Buissart—that of April 1, 1790.

the Breton Club continued under another name when the Assembly was transferred to Paris. By one testimony[1] it appears in the Place des Victoires, by another it is directly transferred to the Rue St. Honoré; the general result is that the members of the Breton Club, sooner or later—probably in late November 1789[2]—reunited in Paris. Wherever they may have fixed their first meetings, it is certain that by December 1789 they had hired the refectory of the old Jacobin convent in the Rue St. Honoré, at a rent of eight pounds a year.[3]

The Dominicans of the Rue St. Honoré, like their more important house in the University and like every religious establishment in the capital, were in active decay. Of their exact numbers I have been able to discover no record, but their chapter-house, their library was empty; their walls ruinous. The Head received the radical club with enthusiasm; it was upon his proposition that the monastery was opened to them and at his instance that the low rent was fixed; the members of the House joined its sessions. In this broken and mouldering place, set back in its dark courtyard and, as it were, secret, the direction of the Revolution grew. From this it never departed till, in Thermidor, the Revolution itself may be said to have turned to decline.

In these first months of its life the society, though already intense, was but little known. The public did not attend it. No reports were published. Its gatherings were small. We have hardly a record of it, save from half-a-dozen royalist attacks, and of the month of April which Robespierre presided only one quiet clerical debate

[1] Thus Montjoie, a singularly unreliable man, will have it that the club sat at 407 Place des Victoires, *independently* of the Jacobins for some time after the formation of the latter. Revillieu Lepeaux will have it that there was no true continuity, &c.

[2] Mounier says "at the beginning of 1790." That can hardly be just, for De Lameth, an active member, recollected the admission of *non-deputies* in December 1789.

[3] A. de Lameth, "Histoire de l'Assemblée Constituante," i. 442 (note).

has come down to us: the proposal of a curé to rest content with the advance reform had already made. Nor would even Robespierre's election to its presidency at this early date be worth mention were it not for the supreme influence which the club was destined to acquire.

Paris, then, which gave him everything at last, was to give him, even as early as the spring of 1790, his first point of vantage in the chair of the Jacobins; there he was to be heard by the numerous witnesses who, by the consistent policy of the club, included whatever in the professional and trading classes was liberal and distinguished.

The first months of obscurity were over and the day was passed when (almost the last of his humiliations in the court town) his absurd formula for the signing of law, "Be this law sacred and inviolable for all," had called forth the wit of a Gascon, and when the repartee "No Anthems!" had raised a great laugh all over the Assembly at Versailles. A month of Paris had destroyed for the wits the cultivated isolation in which such ridicule was a weapon. He could now continually propose a phrase or motion equally didactic; the Assembly would neglect to condemn it and the public would even applaud.

I have no space to detail his speeches upon the decrees and laws that passed before the Assembly in that autumn and winter with the order and rapidity of a train of thought; it must suffice to recall the principal occasions upon which he spoke and the tone of his interference. When, immediately after the arrival of the Assembly in Paris, the lynching of a baker at a stone's-throw from the Archévéché provoked the proposition of martial law, he, of course, denied its necessity under any circumstances whatsoever. When in the next month it was discussed what classes of citizens might be excluded from full citizenship, he spoke, of course, for the actor, for the Protestant, and for the Jew, simply asking whether they were not men.

The Parliament, cautious and intent upon immediate applications, selected and postponed. The Protestant, appreciable in the nation, practically represented in the Assembly, was fused into the new state. For the Actor, what could be done? A prejudice, still strong among Europeans, regarded the continual assumption of emotions always false and often evil, as a ruin to the character. No law debarred actors from civic privileges, how could a law restore their public standing? The Parliament masked the position with a resolution and passed on. As for the Jews, his arguments were of no avail. The Assembly adopted that theory by which they are regarded as a tolerated but alien colony, and gave them all the criminal and civil privileges but left them under all the political disabilities which such a definition involves.

On two occasions Robespierre came down from these absolutes. Once when, like a lawyer, he spoke mildly of a partial revolt organised by the old provincial Parliament of Cambrésis, and once when in the debate on the size of the new departmental bodies, he exposed in a really practical application the Rousseauan view of Assemblies. "If there are to be Assemblies, let them be large. A small one works too well." For he had here, as everywhere, the weakening of arbitrary authority at heart and the uplifting of that right to self-government which resides in the individual; a right that is easily deflected by too able a representative body.

These debates, however, saw little of him and made no great mark. His defence of the Jews is forgotten, his pleading for the Protestants swallowed up in that of abler men; what remains is the persistent attack which he led against the fixing of any but a universal suffrage. In this he very nearly appeared a leader, he was always well up in the front of the attack and even showed a kind of passion in his determination to oppose. It was the whole of himself, the root principle of all:—for if a

criterion of wealth or standing limited the civic right by ever so little, the Man was no longer the basis of the State, but there remained only property, or land, or letters, or some accident of the Man. From the first proposal in early October to the final decree at the close of January, he wore and broke himself against this barrier, the foreign theory of the Assembly that the privilege of representation was limited by the ability to pay taxes. That he had grown greater in the process is most apparent by the scene of the night of the final vote; the storm of the 23rd of January.

He had so far lost hope that he recalled to his use his legal training and offered wise terms. "Let the Assembly suspend all action till the taxes were re-arranged. If a certain minimum of *direct* taxation were required to make a man a voter that would disfranchise nearly all his own people in the Artois. The land was largely on lease and the basis of taxation was narrow. He did not ask a final decision, he demanded only a suspension of the law until it should be made more clear that only the very indigent were included in the disfranchised."

What was there in this that provoked such scenes in the Manège? The Right left their benches, and poured into the floor of the hall, the noise drowned all speech, and Robespierre was like a man standing under a steep wave of assault. Why? Because his proposal hinted at the reversal of a decree, and the decrees of the Assembly were to be laws graven.

This stands first in the political spirit of the time, that everything the Assembly did was thought to be done for ever. France, by an organic and spontaneous fusion which a mind foreign to the French has called "anarchy," was plastic for a moment; it was the business of that moment to model, while it was yet plastic, what would so soon become a rigid society. The prin-

ciples, therefore, that underlay their effort the Assembly feared to depart from, lest by too long discussion and the permission of too much vagary they should leave no completed work at the end of their short two years.

Robespierre failed. The next day it was a law that the electorate should consist of those who paid at least some little tax; that the elected must at least have some little fortune. Of the wisdom of this it is no part of my business to judge. The wisest, Mirabeau himself, feared the wayward indigence of the ruined towns and the dependence of the meaner peasants upon the seignorial power; and among the historians, Michelet himself condones the fault. It affected the Revolution profoundly, for it exasperated the discontent of Paris of which Maillard was a hidden captain. It prevented the legality of what was there fated to rise, and made of the egalitarian conclusions that were in the blood of the Revolution and that could not but become its open principles, a philosophy in revolt.

The two months that followed had less of his effort in them than the character of their debates might have warranted. They turned so largely upon judicial matters that he, a competent authority, should have played a greater part in them. But his reputation was no longer for these things, and it was in the character of Robespierre to note his own reflection in the popular mind. When a renewed incendiarism destroyed the country houses, he was still vigorously opposing martial law, and clinging with a false pedantry to his phrases. He used in a speech the legal jargon of a lawyer and spoke of "arson." A deputy of the Right became a little angry and cried, "Call them brigands." "I will call them citizens accused of arson." "Oh! call them brigands and have done with it." "I will confine myself to the exact truth and call them citizens accused *but not yet proved guilty* of arson." That interlude shows one all

his thinness in the debates of the late winter. But this exact and unreal method raised him, for it was the principal contrast to the old régime and showed, alive, the new Reason on which men feasted. He did indeed stand apart in a memorable way in the debate on the monastic orders, but this, which was the origin of a whole attitude towards the clergy, I describe later. It must suffice here to insist upon the theoretic character of all he said throughout February and March.

Such an attitude was meant for the Jacobins, and very steadily, without intrigue, he was made prominent by their temper. So at the end of March they elected him to the chair. He was not yet the first nor near the first. Barnave was their orator, Duport their head, Mirabeau their attendant. But he had been recognised. His special fitness for the management of debate, his quasi-official quality, had obtained an opportunity. Neither he nor those who saw him there forgot its exercise. This little thing, the choosing of the extremist for a minor honour, was almost the last act of the united reformers. With April a man of acute observation would have seen the first appearance of two resistances that were to split the State; the real power of the King, the postulates of the Church. These wedges had by the summer made wide clefts, within a twelvemonth they had turned the Revolution from prose to vision; at last they brought forth '93 and there was nothing but war.

. . . . . .

Such was the uneventful process of his entry into the politics of his country. It was a year since he had left Arras for the Parliament.

# CHAPTER IV

## PARIS

SINCE I am unravelling in this book the track of an individual and solitary mind, I discover myself to be perpetually neglecting the medium in which that mind acted, the medium which it so strangely neglected, and yet which chose to exalt it utterly beyond its due. I am neglecting the Revolution.

It is impossible rather than difficult to combine that mind with those surroundings. The main fact which has impressed itself upon me, as I have learnt more and more of what Robespierre might be—the contrast and dissociation between himself and the time that deified him—forbids any just weaving of such separate textures. I have shown him a nonentity; I am about to show him a laborious aspirant; I shall show him in the end a symbol, and at last a victim to his own misunderstanding of the illusion that made him a chief. Yet that would be no story of himself which did not pause here and there to consider the prodigious changes in the landscape through which—blinded by a distant, unapproachable, and perhaps imaginary goal—he was passing.

The world he had entered in May 1789 was full of a great, vague, gentlemanly hope, but it was strictly confined to the traditions of its ancestry. It could think only in terms of its decadence. Its physical metaphors, its immediate appreciation of things, were drawn from a dying society. In ten months something—I will attempt its outline, but none can pretend to its full presentment

—had brought forth new terms, new postulates, even new physical details in the habitual experience of the mind. A tide set contrary to the common sequence of change: men thought, as it were, in the future; their memories were warped or transfigured by the expectation of that which they were making, as, in more ordinary times, our picture of what we are making is warped or transfigured by the colour of our memories. Whence came that more than natural impulse? From without; for it is not in men to think beyond themselves. From what outer region did it come? I will hazard the reply that the energy and self-development of that high moment came from the infinite past of which we, each of us, bear, more tenuous but far less mortal than our troubled selves, the living ghost. The tribe was awake; the village; the clan marching in the hills. The man that had made the world was asking himself again those prodigious questions which once, in his beginnings, he had answered with immediate simplicity: he had slept and was refreshed, therefore he attacked their solution with a morning vigour; but he had slept and had forgotten and his lair had grown tangled in his sleep. How was it no one asked him counsel on the wars? Who was this he was obeying? Where was the common sanction and the sign of the chief? How was this, that he was tried and condemned by some foreign influence, and why did he tremble before strange judges? Where were his neighbours that had the sole right to judge a man? How came he to be without land or arms? Where was God? He had slept in complexity, and complexity had stifled his sleep.

But for all the tortuous errors and overgrowths of time there is a remedy, and that remedy is the blood in us; the fields and the rivers. The old thing out of which we draw (what they used to call the Mother of the Gods) is simple and resolves all things backward into simplicity it never dies in the souls of men. Therefore when once

in a thousand years accumulated evil by some quick accident arouses nature, all the state grows young and is ready to combat—a new religion leaps out like a sword. Its unity and simplicity are keen like the edges of a sword. It cuts off the bonds of men so that they wonder how bonds were ever laid on them. In these moments it is easy to rebuild a world: and then time comes in again to corrupt, and corruption awaits another resurrection.

All this (which is Nature herself in whom we repose) ran up the central life of the Revolution and drove it. Its rhetoric would seem meaningless or puerile, its exaggerations grotesque, had there not been left the Poets whose function it is to reconcile with our sober admiration and with the vast self-sufficiency of normal times those fantastic strainings out to the things beyond the world. Among these, two of the greatest, Shelley and Hugo, have caught the union of that effort with the fruitful seasons, mingling the Revolution and the winds in the noise of united verses; making '93 a storm of rain before harvest.

Now this character of the Revolution, by which it could create as though from a void, had in a summer and a winter passed, as it were, through generations of development. All the new things for whose secure establishment we should of right demand a long space of time and the opportunity for a slow forgetfulness, here stood out fresh, untrammelled by memories. For it was in the nature of this crisis that the immediate past fell out of sight altogether. There stood between '89 and '90 the strange barrier between sleep and waking; and the Assembly in Paris in the second spring took up the thread of immemorial rights, left vaguely unremembered the motives of the last generations, precisely as a man waking recovers his identity of yesterday and leaves to an instantaneous dissolution the thin dreams of the night. Whatever in dreams is awful or confused

or madly inconsequent, and whatever in them provokes their flight back into nothingness, that quality attached, in the mind of 1790, to the old disorder. It is a prodigy whose appearance in history is too rare for an exact comprehension. I know no metaphor to present it save that which I have used.

It was in May that these six hundred Commons had met all dressed in the order of their rank and doubtful on particulars of pride. What had happened in eleven months when with April a new spring brought in the open road for Paris and for Robespierre? In that past May the provinces, jealous, lethargic, wrapped in a ragged heraldry of centuries,[1] sent up their anarchic complaints from their ill-attested census and doubtful boundaries: in this April France seemed over-clearly mapped into the exact departments, oppressed with statistics, ranged like a model. In that May a confused and interwoven tapestry of ranks and privileges, real in the mind of each however unreal in the eye of government, were the whole texture of society: in this April their very names had almost passed out of debate or argument. In that May—a thing to us in this country and at this time impossible to seize—all the nerves of power ran up and met under a strict and corrupt court, or, in the strained tangle of the old régime, broke somewhere on the road and left the executive paralysed: in this April there was hardly left one power that in law could clash with another, nor any part absolute in the State, but all its functions were co-ordinate and their mutual reactions defined. The long agony of the land, the death of feudalism; the abrupt decline of monasticism, its exhaustion and silence; the arbitrary courts, half living and half dead under the weight of custom and of the unquestioned, distant crown; the

[1] For instance, Bearn refusing deputies; sending them only in August 1789: insisting that no customs should be changed. By March 1790 it was quietly become "the department of the lower Pyrenees."

hundreds of dark uncomprehended titles, the "Consuls" of the South; the corporations, the privileges, all had wreathed up suddenly and gone. The void was filled. Upon all those new arrangements that seem to us to bear too sharp a mark of rigidity there was then cast not the softness but certainly the colour of youth, and the palace rose to music, and if the light was hard it was hard with the hardness of morning.

Amid such origins the presence of Robespierre took on something established and permanent; the standard by which he would have remade all the State was common to the mass of men about him, but he repeated its formula and applied its test with a regularity and consistency that were not yet grown wearisome and that even seemed like safeguards amid so much perplexity. For with the new society which the opening season of 1790 proclaimed, the first reactions also, the first resistances and the first menace of confusion appeared.

For the moment he gauged with extreme accuracy every element in his position—or rather his open and reiterated catechism of reform fitted exactly the convictions of his neighbours. Thus he slid, as it were, from the Provincial to the Parisian. In his quarrel with Beaumetz[1] he insisted upon a fiscal change in the Artois, upon direct taxation, that burden most odious to peasants, in order to qualify his reluctant Artesians for the vote, that privilege most desired of the political crowds in the capital. Again, when Desmoulins praised him in

[1] Beaumetz was a noble, head of the council of the Artois, and a colleague and opponent of Robespierre's in the States-General. When the suffrage was limited to taxpayers, Robespierre pointed out that the form of tenure in his province would disfranchise the majority of farmers: true to his principles, he proposed to impose a direct tax in order to include them among active citizens. It may be imagined with what eagerness Beaumetz seized upon the occasion to attack. Robespierre's reply is contained in a rare pamphlet, published by Pottier, of Lille.

his paper for having half-insulted the Court,[1] Robespierre at once and vigorously denied the words ascribed to him. He was indeed, after another year of steady advance, to become the voice against the Crown, but he achieved that fame by no human excess of language; he kept consistently to his formulæ; he worked not against the character and person, but against the glamour and tradition of the King; he escaped the charge of demagogy, yet he undermined the base of the royal power. To speak constantly of "the executive," to call the King "the salaried agent of the nation,"[2] to urge, and to help in passing, the resolution that forbade him to declare war,[3] were the expressions of a political attitude. There was throughout his political activity at this moment a character of careful and continuous effort that closely resembled the legal work at Arras: he put into his daily speeches in the Manège, and into his nightly repetitions of them at the Jacobins, the regular assiduity of a country practice, filling up his hours as punctually and methodically as he had filled them in the bare room of the Rue des Rapporteurs. Though he spoke almost daily, and sometimes at a prodigious length, yet every speech was written out in that small, cramped hand of his, covered with erasures and re-erasures, laboured with a pedantic nervousness in the choice of words. These reams of manuscript, read out through spectacles, scheduled,[4] annotated, the occupation of unvarying mornings, are the chief witness to the nature of his success. In '89,

[1] Calling the Dauphin "Marmot." See *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, No. 28.

[2] It was on the 17th May that he called the King "Premier Commis de la Nation"—a phrase the Assembly shouted down.

[3] So I call for shortness the refusal of the Assembly to give in to Mirabeau, and to let the King have the initiative in the declaration of war (22nd May).

[4] Consider this contrast. Not a note of Danton's remains. England, France, Germany, even America contain everywhere, in private and public collections, the MSS. of Robespierre.

at Versailles, very little regarded; in the winter and spring of '90 familiar at last to the small group of Jacobins, and already a target for the conservative pamphlets, his progression through the summer depends upon and is explained by this unwearying industry. If the word can be used of a mind and body so acute, he plodded.

What, then, was the ultimate nature of his renown when, with the end of the summer, he had risen into the first rank? Why, that he had come to stand for a fixed mark, for the certain repetition of what nearly all men held to be the prime theory of government. You bought your *Révolutions de Paris;* you read regularly your *Moniteur*, your *Patriote Français*, your *Ami du Peuple*, even your *Actes des Apôtres;* and daily you found Robespierre attacked when you would have been attacked, praised for what you wished to see praised, printing what you wished to see printed and firm. The image was colourless, and the more enduring for its lack of colour. It was fixed in the public mind as popular arithmetical rules are fixed in it; repetition, unquestioning acceptance, the test of repeated applications, affirmed it. Men knew that they themselves were at once passionate and tempted; they saw their own foibles reflected even in the grandeur of others. This compromise, that angry cry, another's friendships were suspicious from their very emotion; they betrayed politicians like you or me, too violent for judgment, perhaps, or perhaps bribed by the Court, or perhaps using the Revolution as a means to power. With Robespierre—a stencil, a fixed outline—there could be no danger of such vagaries. That he was mechanical, uncreative, was the condition of his eminence.[1] He was

[1] Here is one instance out of hundreds of the way he could say just the commonplace thing that the public desired to hear. When a certain number of Americans (and the Americans served as a model for the earlier Revolution) presented themselves at the bar of the Assembly with one Paul Jones at their head, and begged to join in the first feast of the

like a seal of metal with which Paris could be sure of registering its official words.

One principal matter occupies the history of 1790—the Civil Constitution of the clergy. From this the grave disorders of '91, the tragedies of '92 were to proceed. The attitude of Robespierre throughout the debates was the first revelation of his method, showed him as the secure interpreter of the people. Foolishly logical in the application of principles, he became a mouthpiece of the theories, but all the while he was conscious of how little the general instinct of France would as yet permit a thorough policy of attack. He covered the retreat of the priests, holding a careful balance when all the rest of the Left was for sounding a charge. This double attitude of his proceeded from no intrigue: his power of political calculation did not appear till much later in the Revolution. It proceeded from the exact consonance of his mind with the Rousseauan model, and with the spirit of the city in the centre of which he acted. His instincts, that ran to dogma, to the necessity of religion in the State, and to a hatred of the Voltairean negation, preserved him from a thousand enmities, and put into his hands what was to be, two years later, another thread of power—the tradition of protecting Catholicism.

Before I deal with the speeches and votes in which he defined his relations to the Church, I would give some picture of the enormous blunder which the Assembly was about to commit.

Great social forces drive themselves out of their own channel; they undermine their banks. The renewal of France imperilled all the future of its work by leaving to one side—all France had so left it—a principal tradition bound up with the national existence. The

Federation in July, the Speaker (thinking the episode insignificant) thanked them in a few careless words. Robespierre, full of the memory of Franklin, demanded and obtained the printing and official distribution of their address.

Catholic Church holds in the fabric of that country a place so intimate that it is sometimes a question for the curious how far the religion of the Roman Empire has moulded Gaul, and how far the Gallic spirit may be made to account for the character of Western worship.

Consider France. The conversion of the West was not complete, the sixth and seventh centuries were planting Christianity in the remoter hills, when the vague territory which still clung to the memories of a united province assumed the principal rôle in history. The Iberian peninsula was lost, the Italian was overshadowed by Byzantium, the British islands were barbarous, and Germany was but a narrow frontier march of combats when the transformation of our society was working in the "Terra Major." When the seal of Charlemagne was set upon the charter of civilisation — the last testament of Rome, and the original statute of the middle ages—it was from Gaul that his imperial power proceeded. There were his armies recruited, thence they set out for their ceaseless marches, passing, as to an exterior conquest, Roncesvalles, Maurienne, the Rhine; and the fringes of his kingdom closed round the solid quadrilateral of France. As her vernacular arose it was a medium for the first epics of Christendom; in it was propagated the reform of Hildebrand; and when the work of the Normans was accomplished, the sermon preached at Clermont extended it throughout the world. It was the tongue of an armed nobility from the Tyne to the Euphrates; at last a Courtenay spoke it from the throne of Constantinople. In Paris, at the Jacobins of the southern gate, the School was defined; there Aquinas lectured and there the Summa was conceived. On this soil the universities arose; the typical kingship of the Most Christian King ruled it orderly when the Reconquista still made Spain a battlefield, when England was a feudal revolt, when

the Germans were bewildered in the meshes of Italy; nor was it till the approach of the Schism that rent our Europe and thrust Catholicism inward to its centre, that the establishment of new nationalities and the confirmation of new literatures diminished this ancient hegemony. For the thousand years during which our race and its religion were kneaded, the French and the Church were one body.

All this the French had forgotten, and under the pressure of the Revolution the nation attempted to enter a channel exterior to the main watershed of its history. The narrow class which alone remained articulate at the close of the eighteenth century were absorbed in a philosophy so rarefied that the stuff of Christianity seemed to it dross and meaningless. The clergy had suffered the infection, ritual had degenerated to phrase, the typical architecture of northern faith was left in ruins,[1] the life of the religion was obscured. The great places of the Church were filled without a thought of decency by men whom a clique of favourites might choose;[2] so ingrained was the corruption that Louis XVI., devout and simple, continued in its tradition as naturally as in the etiquette of his Court. Even after the Restoration and on into our own time, something political marred and cast suspicion upon the clerics of the reaction, till Lacordaire founded the great work which is but now beginning to prove its vigour. In the Revolution only the poor and the remote preserved the germs of Catholic vitality—to the Assembly and

[1] Not only had they ceased to build the Gothic, they had utterly ceased even to understand it. I have seen, in connection with the writing of an essay on Paris, some hundreds of prints of the eighteenth century, representing the churches of the city. Not one of them has reproduced the detail of the Gothic or caught its spirit, and what is perhaps more remarkable, there is not one true reproduction of the façade of Notre Dame.

[2] Thus in Robespierre's own town of Arras, that great Abbey of St. Waast which dominated it was given to Cardinal de Rohan, the man of the Diamond Necklace.

Paris they were unknown, and such defence as the Church could find had to be left to men like Maury, a dissolute, loud, political priest, destined to intrigue, to survive into the corruption of the Restoration, to snatch a cardinal's hat, and to die somewhere half-starved and unremembered.[1]

In February 1790 monasticism had passed almost without a protest.[2] In June was perfected the scheme by which it was imagined that the clergy could be absorbed into the State, and Catholicism dead be wrapped in the winding-sheet of a civil administration. That error provoked the whole crisis of '90–91; round the resistance of the hierarchy may be grouped all that reaction which was the mark of the autumn, the winter and the following spring; all that fury and exaltation which the reaction in its turn excited among the liberals. Of that spirit, the Crown, the nobility, the army—all the conservative forces of the nation—took advantage. Their combined attack upon the Revolution must not be taken as being the strong thing it seems: it would have had no basis but for the seething of the country-sides, the angers of provincial religion, and the priests determining on a civil war.

Of the disendowment of the Church no mention has

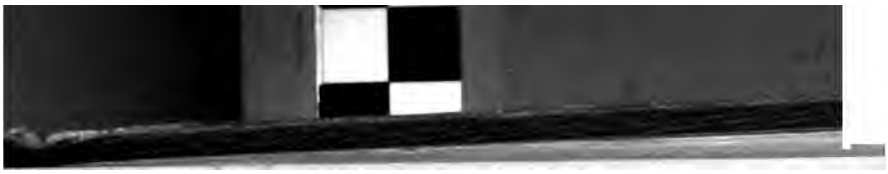
[1] Maury's life was a full commentary on the cause of which he made himself the spokesman; a little picture of the old corruption. The son of a cobbler, he pushed himself into the Academy, and thence into the States-General: in '95 he was made a cardinal and nuncio at Frankfort—at last returning from his emigration to be Archbishop of Paris under Napoleon. After the Restoration he was driven out by his own chapter, achieved a final success by obtaining the Papal blessing, and died, a poor and abandoned adventurer, in 1817, in a house of the Lazarists.

[2] Not abolished, of course, but its recognition by the State, its secular connection with officialdom dissolved; and much the greater part of its property taken from it. It is astonishing how little resistance this decree provoked; a proof of the utter degradation into which monasticism had fallen. No one feature of French life, with the possible exception of the village councils, was more revivified by the new freedom than this fundamental institution of the Catholic Church.

been made, because it was not the true cause of the Schism. Proposed before the Assembly had left Versailles, ratified immediately after its arrival in Paris, the confiscation of the corporate goods of the Church and the appointment of salaries for its hierarchy, had not a little attracted the starving clergy of forgotten villages, had broken the economic power of the great bishops, and had presented to the Revolution, in the immense landed estates of the dioceses, a security against the new currency whose issue was the most immediate of fiscal necessities. Nevertheless, that whole movement had in it a feature which foreign historians too frequently neglect, it worked of necessity against the grain of the country, it could never be perfectly executed, public action halted tardily, long behind the decrees. It was not till April that the first assignats were issued, it was not till a year later that the land upon whose value they were based began to sell with any readiness.

To remedy a false situation and to solve, as it thought, the religious question upon the most reasonable lines, the Assembly, that had already heard the priests defined as "functionaries," proceeded to build up artificially and by rule a church of stone and iron to replace the living organism whose grave maladies they had mistaken for dissolution. It was proposed to assimilate the complex traditions of Catholicism, its hoary anomalies and its depths on depths of mystery with the plain new creed of the democratic bureaucracy. To every department a bishop—elected by the people; to every commune a priest—elected by the people. The link with Rome was just preserved in an official announcement from each diocese as its see was filled. Dogma was left, by implication, to occasional Gallican councils.

There is no marvel in the imposition of so extraordinary a mould upon the fabric of French religion. The whole mass of educated Frenchmen, I repeat, had





in that last generation of the eighteenth century been cut off from religion. Never before, since his philosophers had surrounded Julian in his palace on the island, had Lutetia lost so much of her worship; never since in all the dogmatic negations of our century have the ruling intellects of France so thoroughly ignored the colour and kind of Christianity. Nor was this all: the Assembly had here and there among its most powerful and brilliant men, orators whom a special tradition urged against the Apostolic see: Camus, the last of the Jansenists, that would only speak of the "Bishop of Rome"; Lanjuinais, the Canonist of Rennes, trained to defend in the courts of Brittany "the Gallican liberties"; Rabaut St. Etienne, whose amiable round face concealed very bitter memories and who had been born, he did not himself know where, the child of persecution.

Treilhard's report upon the anarchy of the religious administration and the gross inequalities of the benefices was read on the 30th of May. De Boisgelin, the vigorous Archbishop of Aix, academician, poetaster, liberal, court preacher[1] rose to answer and struck the new note; a creed as important as the creed of Rousseau was discovered to be alive and the Revolution had polarised upon two centres of attraction—hence was to spring the civil war.

"Jesus Christ sent out His apostles for the saving of souls. He gave that task neither to magistrates nor to kings. . . . You are urged to-day to suppress a portion of that ministry,[2] to define its power, to arrange the limits of its jurisdiction. That power was founded and those limits set by the apostles. There is no human power that can touch or meddle with it of right. . . ."

[1] He fled later on to England, became a cardinal, re-entered with the Concordat and died at the age of seventy-two Archbishop of Tours in the year that Napoleon was crowned. Two things lay him under suspicion as a poet—he translated Ovid and arranged a metrical version of the Psalms.

[2] The Civil Constitution destroyed 51 out of 134 dioceses.

The debates proceeded. On the morrow Robespierre read his precise essay, which, being an essay, he did not hesitate to divide into three heads: that the number and functions of the clergy should be limited by their direct use to society (he admitted and applauded that use); that they should be elected by the general voice; that they should be the salaried servants of the community. So far it was a feast of commonplaces and of agreement with the committee that had studied the question and framed the bill. But at the close of his speech he did something that indicated at once his acute political touch and the compromise that he was determined to maintain between the Church and the new society. He knew that every one had something in his mind which no one dared to mention—celibacy.

Should the State ratify such marriages as these men, its new servants, might choose to contract? It would seem in keeping with the Rights of Man. But then, if a priest married, could his bishop drive him from his cure; could the Church forbid the exercise of his ministry? If not, what power of interior discipline had the Church? What remained of the contention that the civil constitution left her intact? Here was a peculiar and sacred custom grown to be part and parcel of Latin Christianity—to touch it was to awaken with a stroke of horror the dormant Catholicism of the nation, to neglect it was to deny in practice to a servant of the State one of the primary rights common to all citizens.

In all impassable situations there is some such test matter which reveals the self-contradiction that marks a deadlock. When a man is prepared to discover and present such a test question to a nervous assembly, he has given proof of leadership because he has shown political daring. This Robespierre knew. The instinct in him to publish himself continually, the desire

to be heard first on a matter that could not but become of major interest, the exact appreciation he had of what the Assembly was, all appeared in the form he gave to his venture. He mixed hesitation into his advance.

"I come now," he said, like any professor, "to another matter. It will be generally agreed that it might be well to bind every citizen as far as possible to society. . . ." One or two anxious men on the Right and a prelate or so smelt heresy and began to protest; the Left applauded as though to a peroration . . . yet he had said nothing. He continued with extreme care, "I desire to say nothing that might offend common sense or even the public opinion of our time. . . ." The applause and the protests grew general. He looked round quietly, folded his manuscript and left the tribune. In this way did Robespierre deal with the celibacy of the clergy. He established the reputation of a pioneer, but he had used neither the word marriage nor the word priest, and he had escaped a battle royal.[1]

The debates proceeded. For days he spoke in each without advancing anything further than his original proposition and without departing from his original caution. On the 9th of June he defended the popular election of bishops and used a phrase purely in the tradition of Rousseau. "I recognise the grave inconveniences that attach to this method of choice, but when virtue is departed from most individuals you will find it in the corporate existence of the people. The clergy as a body were they to nominate the bishop could not but be sectional in spirit. I conclude on the whole for the people. . . ."

When, on and after the 16th, the salaries of the

[1] Loustalot, in the 49th number of the *Révolutions de Paris*, proves at once the position these sentences acquired for Robespierre and the monstrous untruths of which journalism can be guilty. He speaks of an address of thanks from "500 priests of Picardy." He promises to publish their names, but he is not so foolish as to keep his promise.

clergy were discussed, his many speeches preserved the same attitude of repetition and of careful handling. He spoke, as he had spoken at Versailles, of "the poverty" that underlay the foundations of Christianity, he attacked the higher salaries proposed for the bishops, he left unopposed the lower incomes of the parish clergy. To the first of these he returned with an approach to energy; on the 22nd he rallied the new functionaries on their debts, asked them if they were "*condemned* to receive twelve hundred a year." He spoke at some length and with fervour for the mass of the lower clergy. He closed the conflict by demanding on the 28th of June pensions for all aged priests, beneficed or non-beneficed. His words in this definite offer to a great group of opinion are worth a literal transcription.

"I call only for a measure of justice. These men have grown old in the ministry, their labours can have brought them nothing but infirmity. They have some claim to your indulgence by their ecclesiastical title; and by something more, by their necessity."[1]

The Assembly refused his demand, but his defence was permanently remembered. Throughout the summer he emphasised his position. He defended in August a priest that had sheltered a conspirator; he lent the ecclesiastical profession a peculiar sanctity when he appealed against its admission to civil office; he is all for liberty in the debate on the Soutane, and when the constitution of the clergy had been voted—signed by the King and notified to Rome; when, in October, the mass of the French Church had revolted in a famous protest and when these grumblings of active opposition were met by the decree enforcing on the priests an oath of loyalty to the Constitution — he stood aside. Amid all that incessant political movement of his there is one fortnight of silence. It is the fortnight in November when the angry

[1] *Moniteur*, 24th and 29th of June 1790.

Assembly, seeing the confiscated Church lands hanging in the market and hearing the persistent cry from pulpit after pulpit for resistance, determined to coerce the Church, ordered the administration of the civic oath to the clergy and threatened to deprive all those who refused it.

Time and a long sequence of political effect have proved to us the fundamental importance of the ecclesiastical question in 1790. At the time it seemed but one of a hundred points in the triumph of a reasonable order. The passages I have quoted are evidence of Robespierre's method in debate, and of his advocacy of the clergy; the whole attitude on which I have insisted helps to explain the future development of his power: the half-unwilling support which, during the Terror, the silent Right continued to afford him. His way of dealing with the priests in 1790 laid the strongest foundations of his success and reveals his inner sentiment most clearly. Nevertheless, it was almost unheeded by the radicals. The Robespierre whom the professional classes of the capital had begun to regard as their epitome and whom chance hundreds already addressed from every part of France was to them the "unflinching tribune"; the bulwark against compromise and to reaction.

It was he that stood against Mirabeau in the violent debate of the 27th of July, when there was a question of canalising, as it were, the public fury against Condé,[1] it was he that conquered in the division. When, on the 20th of June, all titles of nobility were abolished, it was he that was most particular to drop the "de" with ceremony. It was he that first did that ridiculous thing and dragged out of their obscurity the forgotten family names of the nobles, calling Mirabeau

[1] For I take it to be certain that Mirabeau's special attack on Condé was but a feint to prevent a general attack on the Court and on the sympathy of the Court with the intrigues of the emigrants.

"Riquetti," Lafayette "Mottier." To the crowd such puerilities seemed so many acts of faith, and he alone dared make them. It was he, again, that was for ever defending private soldiers and sailors against the rigour of the new code, that protested most energetically against the thanks that were voted to Bouillé for the fierce repression whereby he had re-established discipline at Nancy. In every accident that could bring the pure theory of the Revolution into conflict with realities or with calculated opposition it was his voice which was most demanded: he never failed to make it heard. He was already believed, at the approach of autumn, to be the centre of resistance against the reaction that was rising as the clergy closed their ranks or as the irritation in the army developed and the foreign intrigue began to organise. He had become a personage with whom Mirabeau found it necessary to treat; whom here and there throughout the territory other revolutionaries, destined to names as famous as his own, addressed from the silence or confusion of their provinces.

Among these letters was one which wove into his life and into the Revolution an episode of worship: a devotion that coloured the Terror and brought into the empty simplicity of Robespierre's own life the pomp of ardour. It was a message from St. Just.

That boy—noble, disordered, of an extreme beauty, tall, graceful in gestures—matched his distinction with words that seemed found or chosen for his peculiar cast of body and of soul. His purpose, his enthusiastic courage, his sudden eloquence, were later to enter the Republic like a strain of fierce music. He surrounds the Robespierrean tradition as a frame half grotesque, half gorgeous may surround a hard, imperfect drawing; yet, incongruous as he was to the man whom he followed, he lends to this man's story a wild interest that preserves it. Once already St. Just had flashed into the Revolution when he burnt the pamphlets of the reaction in his southern

village and swore to defend the new order, stretching out his hand over the flame in a pagan memory. The theatrical in which that time abounded, the pedantic by which it was continually marred, became in him, by I know not what touch of brilliancy, the dramatic or the revelation of antiquity.

He possessed also this supreme quality: that time and battles put ballast to his angers and his visions, that under strain he grew greater than himself. When he came to his end he had reached to the appreciation of ordered law and to the power of creating new things.

The allegiance of this genius, the acceptation of his mission by such a mind, was a final mark of the stage Robespierre had reached in his advance. It christened him leader.

With this assured success the summer drew into autumn; with the autumn[1] a further development tided him on a further stretch of his way. The Jacobins, the small half-secret place where he had gradually outstripped Duport, the Lameths and Barnave, were the caucus whose leadership was to give him as an appanage the leadership of the whole Left, of the mountain and at last of the Republic. They had blossomed from a single stem into an undergrowth, multiplied and become a nation. This transformation was the work of the great Federation of July—the thousand towns that are like the pillars of France had touched through their delegates the direct issues of the struggle. The provincial Federations throughout the country had prepared a generous though a facile enthusiasm; that enthusiasm had, during those few days of sheer light in July, discovered a material on which it could work; it had felt the strengthening of the reaction, it had seen the enemy from beneath his

[1] Hamel speaks of this letter as "coming some time in the middle of August." It can only have come at the very end of the month, for it is dated the 19th, and could not have taken less than a week or ten days to reach Paris.

own walls, from the streets that surrounded the palace. Against this enemy the organisation—the inquisition—of the Jacobins of the Rue St. Honoré was designed. The provincial Federations returned to their homes and set up everywhere a model of the central society. These, linked into a hard discipline with the mother house, receiving its orders, taking in light from it as from the eye of Paris, set up posts and beacons for the liberals: watch-towers of suspicion. Wherever the new municipal life had arisen in the vast awakened territory, this network of the clubs had its unit and agent: they garrisoned and organised France. The autumn made the Jacobins because it made the reaction. The clergy in revolt provoked that other clergy who were devotees to the reform. Thus it was at the close of August that the King signed the Civil Constitution; at the close of October that De Boisgelin and the thirty bishops of the Assembly issued their "Exposition of Principle," at the close of November that the oath was insisted upon by the violent decree of the Assembly—from that date the stirring of the villages became a turmoil: the priests cried martyrdom. And side by side with the growth of this solid resistance, with the growth therefore of new hopes in the Court, in the foreign cabals, in the emigrants, went the increase of the Club, the watcher and jailer of the court and the foreigner. The membership of the Jacobins of Paris had in early '90 been but 400—mostly drawn from the Assembly: it had risen with the late summer to over a thousand, mostly citizens. Opinion exterior to the Parliament dominated it and chose the favourites.

A week before the King consented in despair to sign the Civil Constitution of the Church, there were 152 provincial clubs associated with the Club. A few weeks after the attempt to administer the oath had failed they had risen to 227, a month later to 343; yet a month later to 406—half France. It had re-

cognised its own immensity and power, had drawn up its first lists,[1] had arranged its method of command when December called a kind of halt and left opposed the two forces: old France resurrected by the radicals' capital error, new France turned angry and ready for every suspicion, later for every violence, in defence of the liberty it had won. The deadlock in the organisation of the new clergy, the refusal of the oath, the manifest sympathy for the priests felt by the thousands of little villages which the Revolution itself had rendered autonomous and whose freedom it dared not curb, the doubt as to what would be the action of Rome, the foreign intrigues turned back again underground—all these left action doubtful.

The year 1791 was introduced therefore by a curious silence. The situation was like that which has appeared in certain battles: the ground is won, the general advance has been successfully made, but the enemy is known to be strongest in his last line. His retirement has but concentrated his resistance and the attack hesitates before the final blow. There has been neither rout nor capitulation—an open plain of dangerous width lies between the positions the advance has conquered and the last trenches of the defence. In such a crisis at the worst hesitation, at the best delay, seizes on the victorious army; its tension relaxes; the men talk to each other. So the Revolution hesitated and so before its final advance the reaction gathered.

The radicals turned in upon themselves, to dinners, evening arguments and confabulations, to concerting plans — even to domestic interests. The marriage of Desmoulins two days before the New Year is very typical of the time. The Left in unison seem to retire into

[1] The first list is that of December 1790. The material of this I have drawn from a speech of Desmoulins, from the preface of Aulard's *Histoire des Jacobins*, and (with some reserve) from Michelet's traditional account of the development of the club.

their homes; they come to the marriage, doing honour to their pamphleteer. Brissot, Pétion, Robespierre sign the register in the vestry; the priest, unconstitutional, of course—(Desmoulin's old head-master)—gives his paternal benediction to the love-match. It was as though men were saying, "Soon the supreme struggle will blind us; let us go back and rest for a moment in the past."

This lull seemed perhaps an opportunity to the failing grasp of a man who has appeared but fitfully in these pages of a single biography—who yet filled the time: Mirabeau. The decrees on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had passed; the oath had been presented and in the main refused,[1] but the Pope's brief had not yet fallen to decide an active struggle.

Mirabeau caught the opportunity of the lull; he noticed death approaching; he came up out of his degradation; he took every advantage of the moment; he intrigued and intrigued. But his intrigues were even at this time not mainly directed to the sustenance of the throne or to the establishment of that limited monarchy and that English model which haunted his travelled experience—they were mainly directed to the warding off of foreign interference, to keeping high the stability and honour of the country abroad, to preventing the Court from looking beyond the frontiers. On either side he touched failure. His reports came almost unheeded to the Court cabal that saw nothing in his genius but a useful trick wherewith to deceive the populace: his suspected acceptance of the King's money, his creed of compromise and balance roused against

[1] All the bishops but four, and two-thirds of the priests refused the oath. So seriously was the farce taken that these four bishops were at the pains of having every canonical rule observed when they instituted their schismatic colleagues. Three of them were even at the pains of laying on hands, and the Gallican Church that lived two years was in possession of Apostolic orders.

him in a final effort the anger of the Left and the political puritanism of the Jacobins. Duport, Barnave, the Lameths grew stronger and more bitter against him as he weakened; it was apparent as the winter proceeded that he must lose his hold.

The last day of February, a date not often remembered, should form a landmark; it was the beginning of Mirabeau's agony, and the end of his prodigious resistance. At the Jacobins that night a kind of storm broke over him; the accumulated suspicion which had grown round his name, the accumulated effect of so many partial but increasing defeats in debate came then together and raged about him openly—Duport and Lameth blamed him almost by name, all the eyes of the long library turned on him, and every outburst of applause that met the denunciation of compromise fell upon him like a shower of arrows. Many things that were to mark the later Revolution flared up under the lamps of that evening—the open quarrel with the Court, the abandonment of old leaders, the omnipotence of the Club, the schism that was to branch into further and further divisions till one small remnant, the Mountain, should alone be left for '93.

Especially this appeared: the deliberate idolisation of the new names and the false worship of Robespierre. For the very action of Mirabeau's which the club was condemning, and which put the match to their indignation, had been supported in the Parliament by Robespierre. He also had argued with a cold exactitude of principle, as had Mirabeau with a violent eloquence, to defeat the law against emigration; and when the greater man, despairing of France, bent upon saving the Crown, had thundered out, "Silence, you thirty voices!" he had seemed to draw the lesser man into the vortex of his energy, and to be making a protection for Robespierre against the interruptions of the Left. Robespierre, simply because

it seemed to him an inconsistency, refused to trammel liberty, even in order to check the tide of emigration.

The Parliament in the morning had seen this, but the club in the evening would have nothing of the truth. It was entering the phase of enthusiasm where men see not what is, but what they will, and though Mirabeau quoted in his defence the agreement of Robespierre, his argument went for nothing. The people had been up and out that day; they had marched to Vincennes, had been checked by Lafayette—now definitely an enemy—had poured about the Tuileries, had challenged the defenders of the King. On such a day the extremists refused to remember anything in Robespierre but that he was their principle in the flesh. They mutinied against the man whose wisdom and whose affections, whose apprehension of what France was, but also whose debts and whose attachments of birth and habit, combined now to make him something separate from the reform. If both had defended the right of emigrants to pass the frontiers, the club was determined to find corruption in Mirabeau's defence, in Robespierre's an excess of zeal for liberty.

It was with pathetic and sincere insistence that Mirabeau attempted a reply. The reply was listened to without murmurs, but without applause. The gist of it appeared in a phrase that came certainly from his large heart, his memories of leadership, and his appreciation of failure, and perhaps of disaster. "I shall always be one of you—even if it comes to exile." It was to come to the longest of exiles.

He sat down, his vigour gone, the strong poise of his head abandoned, and in the powerful forwardness of his face a hollowness and a kind of resignation; the falling of so much sustained and rebutting effort. His mastery was ended. Desmoulins, sitting not far off, and watching him closely as the club dissolved, wrote down this note: "He has passed into Olivet."[1]

[1] *Rév. de France et de Brabant*, No. 67.

For a month a kind of lull surrounded the departure of this great man. March was empty, hardly occupied by insignificant debate,[1] and by a coincidence common enough in the history of great movements, a shadow of silence passed backward out of what was to come. Mirabeau spoke less, demanded less ardently. A weight came on him and on France. His sleep left him, and his strength. With the end of the month he died proudly, and, as long as his eyes could follow life and the sun, they were fixed upon the Crown he had attempted to save.

It has been said that Mirabeau dying left the world empty for Robespierre to fill. The phrase is exaggerated and false. We now, who can tell what Robespierre was to become, see in it an element of truth. For that time, and for the appreciation of the exact course which fame took with Robespierre, it has not even such an element. The effect of Mirabeau's death upon the career of Robespierre was negative and tardy; an artist had disappeared, and round his death-bed there gathered a sunset in whose glow was lost the effect of lesser reputations, and only on the diffusion of which it could be discovered that one man especially remained to stamp by reiteration upon the public a name rather than a character. This is much truer, that since things lost are replaced by things of their own kind, Mirabeau dying left France in heritage or as a ward to Danton. But this is truer still, that when Mirabeau was dead, one great, hidden, suspected, unmentioned verity was released into the daylight; the King was afraid of himself.

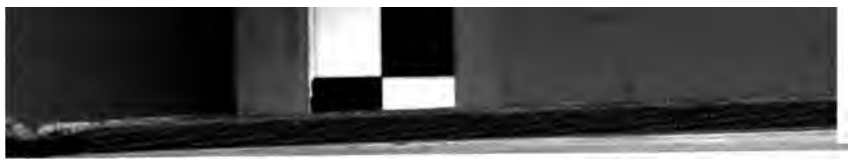
What had passed in that soul? History has never solved the problem, and never will, because he could barely speak or write or express, though he was of the first importance in France. Louis was Catholic, he was sincere, he was (so far as political terms may be used of

[1] For instance, there was nothing of Robespierre's but the defence of an obscure priest.

character) a liberal; he was French and he was patriotic; he could love a little and was very firm upon the loves he comprehended. He may be said with justice never to have betrayed the Church, and never to have signed a decree that seemed to him enormous or essentially inimical to society. But there ran in him a something very mysterious, which one of the fatal short cuts of history has chosen to describe as weakness. If it was weakness, it was a weakness like a muscular weakness of the heart, or like a nervous fault, something extraneous to his general self; something that made him—a man not without firmness, and, alas! not without ruse—suddenly stupid at moments, and in a crisis utterly at sea.

The Revolution is still near to us, it reveals itself partially by documents and more by its political effects. The personality of Mirabeau grows out of it on the distance, as the Alps grow out of the summer plains when a man follows the shallow Durance downwards to the Rhone, and sees at last the majesty of the hills he came from. Assuredly the more the Revolution is studied the more will it be seen that the Court leant heavily upon Mirabeau. The staff broke in death. There remained in the noisy palace that had still so great a power no principle of support.

There remained the Queen, who but for her disdain and birth might now merit the description of petulant; there remained the ruck of sword-men, mostly noble, the dregs that incapacity had left stranded even in that springtide of opportunity; and there remained the virtue of a few good women who knew less of the world than children do. Lastly, by an irony of kingship, the very theory of the Court, in its domestic ordering, gave the King the principal power. And the King was afraid. A mob had been to him from the first days of '89 what breakers are beneath to a man unused to boats, or a horse beneath a man that cannot ride.





Mobs were very little in the Revolution. The more the people were determined, and the more they achieved, the less of the mob was there in their arrangement (for a mob is the people powerless.) But what there had been of them—especially the roaring irruption of October—had left the King suddenly without bearings. This fear determined his inconsistencies, or, at least, if not this, then nothing can explain them. His firmness, his natural piety, his pride (which was not small) left him when he saw humanity enormous and disorganised; he was more afraid of it than are even landsmen of the sea.

To this weakness, emphasised as it was by the hundred separate misconceptions of France that haunted his wife, his friends, his confessor, his guards, the puissant and manifold spirit of Mirabeau had stood corrective. Such a man, with the vices or necessities of large desires, with the comprehension or compromise of wide vision, filled up, supplemented, the inequalities and emptiness of the palace. There was nothing about him single or direct enough to parry the just accusation that followed him; he had need of the Court, or at the best he had affection for it; from one time to another the colour or the pressure of the world allured or drove him away from principle; he had received a pension; he had weighed the dead France against the living and he had hesitated very much at the sharp solutions that drive through the complexity of existing culture, tearing (as he feared) the web of society. But this man to whom a mixture of wisdom, energy, and physical foible, had combined to give statesmanship, conquest, temptation, and something of incertitude or prudence—this man had been the very medicine of the Court. Every power in him was what the Court had lacked, every wistfulness in him for justice helped him to link the Court up with the Reform and to preserve it in spite of itself. Above all,

his grasp of reality held united from either side the formulæ of the conquering Left and the empty echoes of a dying ceremonial. This bond and support was gone.

By a wretched coincidence Louis was to experience, within a few days of that loss, just such an accident as most bewildered him. Mirabeau died upon the 2nd of April. Upon the 18th the King blundered in public.

It would be foolish to read into the 18th of April more than exactly happened. Certainly it was not religious scruple that drove the King to leave his palace to make his Easter communion at St. Cloud. His communion would have been valid enough at the hands of any chance priest. By one account[1] he had already communicated in the palace. Almost as certainly it was no definite plan to fly the city. He would not have fled thus through the streets in state and with good warning. It was a desire to find air and room, to be himself, to show how much remained to him and to re-enter his own personality (with which every habit of kingship was involved) that led him to St. Cloud. St. Cloud was his favourite sojourn and his habit for that time of the year; he knew he risked a little in the proposal, he delighted in the prospect of success over that little risk. The result was overwhelming: the streets, full of an intricate mixture of protesting citizens and revolted militia, the vain efforts of Lafayette, the mob, not dangerous nor inspired by a special hatred but still the mob, barred up his passage. His coach swung there three hours on its high great springs: his own face looked out blameless and alarmed over innumerable faces. At last he despaired. He re-entered the palace and there was no one to tell him the meaning of what he had seen. After this accident, to him incomprehensible or monstrous—or perhaps confirming the dread that had hitherto been but inexactly rooted—he accepted

[1] Lafayette's.

what can only have been hitherto a plot formed by others. He looked, not yet indeed to the foreigner, but to the frontier[1] for safety, and was ready for flight.

Two months separated this accident from that catastrophe. They were marked by a temper of acute antagonism rather than by any appearance of definite policy. Historians upon either side pretend to find in these months the beginnings of republicanism in the clubs or the symptoms of overt treason at the Court. It is the spirit of the time rather than the exact witness of documents that provokes them to such exaggeration. The plain truth is that while the Crown and the politicians still kept their old claims intact the disappearance of Mirabeau had left an unbridgeable gulf between the parties. It was not more than this. There were many who would have been willing enough to have demanded openly the help of the kings in the defence of their King, but they did not direct the policy of the Court. That policy still depended upon the decision of Louis, and Louis, though bewildered by a thousand suggestions, would not as yet have let drop the nation he ruled into the abyss of an invasion. There were many, again, especially on the south side of the river, in the University, in the Cordeliers, who would openly have attacked the palace. But they did not direct the opinion of the city. They can hardly be said to have influenced the Jacobins who were now become the permanent judges and moderators of the revolutionary movement, and stood for an organised force covering the whole of France with a system of societies.

Since, then, an acute tension in the political atmosphere accompanied by a certain pettiness in political action was the mark of that opening summer, Persons

[1] I take it as certain that he intended nothing but a flight to the high hill of Montmédy, and that he remembered Mirabeau's advice of finding a refuge in the provinces.

began to take the place of principles in the affections, terrors, and hatreds of men. Thus Lafayette and the ministry became an object of direct persistent attack and thus Robespierre himself passed more and more for the pure democracy of which he was but the sign and the title. It is curious to note how in the very moment that public report, in spite of himself, exalted him—in this triumph of individuals—Robespierre could not find it in him to speak the names of opponents or to unsheath invective. He was thrown back, as it were, upon his literary faculty; he seemed to abandon combat.

Contrast with such a mind Danton, about to attack Lafayette, the man; quarrelling with him body to body on the day of the 18th of April. He had seen, touched, and felt that stiff, but rather sentimental personality. It was through the medium of such real and physical acquaintance that men of Danton's kind appreciated the growth of the reaction. They knew that the National Guard was becoming more and more the middle class armed; they knew that a conflict between it and the mass of popular opinion might any day break out; but they summed up their knowledge in their mistrust of Bailly and of Lafayette.

Robespierre, in proportion as the quarrel approached, withdrew himself more and more into generalities. He saw the danger of the National Guard turned a weapon for the counter-revolution, but to meet that danger he could do nothing but recite as a speech a vast essay full of just reasoning. An appeal for a purely democratic organisation of the militia took the place with him of definite political action at the end of April, and, what is yet more characteristic of the man, this essay was but a repetition and expansion of an opinion which he had already laid down four months before, when no crisis called for it, and when only a man enamoured of absolute principles could have dealt with the matter at all.

This abstraction is illustrated in his every action, but two especially mark and emphasise it. It was he who broke the continuity of the revolutionary parliaments, and it was he, of all others, who at such a time attempted to abolish capital punishment.

It was on the 18th of May that he urged the Assembly to the decree which contributed so much to the disasters of the succeeding year, for it was he who opposed with the most convincing pertinacity the re-election of the members of the Assembly whose term was drawing to a close. There could be found no better proof of his temper and of the surroundings that put a halo on that unreality of his, than the proposal of such a decree at such a moment. The confidence that they were building up something eternal inspired his audience; a conviction that immediate matters should never disturb fundamental decisions inspired the orator. If there were one thing desirable to a man that could foresee the advent of war, and the outbreak of an acute conflict between the Revolution and the Crown (one thing that Mirabeau, had he survived, would have demanded), that thing would have been the retention in public office of the men who were now familiar with the machinery they had created. But it is common to all systems of democracy to demand a rotation in the distribution of power, and as though no immediate considerations interfered, as though France were really at leisure to build up her Utopia, Robespierre proposed, argued, and carried his theorem. The majority was enormous, and the pamphlets of all the revolutionaries, from Desmoulins to Barrère,[1] applauded and pointed out as its author the unique probity of Robespierre.

In his denunciation of capital punishment, at the same period of monotonous political work, the curious will not fail to notice a certain humour. That contrast lay in no inconsistency of character; the speech was

[1] See *Rév. de France et des Royaumes*, No. 78; *Patriote Français*, 647.

thoroughly in keeping with his manner, proceeded from a profound conviction, was of a piece in its classical quotation, in its pedantic balance, with every portion of his legislation. Nor was he alone in pursuing the ideal of Rousseau. Pétion, a man of just, profound, and exact decision, well versed in jurisprudence, and of a very practical acquaintance with men, agreed with and sustained him. Robespierre would have abolished capital punishment even for political crimes. The Assembly, startled and dignified by phrases that were not without nobility, yet refused to follow him, and heard unpersuaded a true stroke: "Every time you kill a man by law you destroy something of the sacredness of man."

Standing here at the gates of the civil war, fifteen months from the massacres of September, the whole discussion seems to us unreal. Marat, who more than any other had ready in him the beginnings of violence, and who was, so to speak, the Terror already in being, felt its falseness, and quarrelled with the conclusions of Robespierre;[1] but it would not be just to find in the debate an exceptional ignorance of the conditions under which France lay. It was not doubted in '91 that all this thrashing out and settling of the principal points of the code would be final, and the sincere energy which Robespierre displayed in the matter proceeded from a belief which he certainly held in common with the mass of his contemporaries, that the last foundations of a new state were being laid.

The discussions went on their peaceable way, raising him, as it was their special function to do, higher and higher in the public esteem. There were in early June wearisome verities on the liberty of the Press; he quoted Cato. He spoke (as on a foregone conclusion) condemning the attack that a priest had made against the Parliament. He was a candidate for the fortnightly presidency of the

[1] *Ami du Peuple*, 48.

Parliament, and failed. He attempted single-handed to speak against the pensions of recalcitrant officers. In these meaningless debates he confirmed his power with the general; he did not arouse the animosity of the minority. It would seem as if for the moment even the attacks upon him in the royalist journals had ceased, and as if the position he now occupied, a position of security and of rather banal prominence, was principally due to his imperfections of mental vision, to his care against mixing with the immediate quarrel of the time, and perhaps to his failure to perceive where that quarrel was tending. Yet this period left an enduring mark upon his career. It was at this moment, for example, that he was elected to one of the numerous forensic functions, now thrown open to the popular choice: he that had already been chosen for the chief magistrate of Versailles was now made public prosecutor of the town of Paris, and it was also upon the tradition of these six weeks that he set the foundation of the permanent hegemony which he began to exercise over the Club and the city when, two months later, the great Assembly closed. He resigned the functions to which he had been elected by Versailles, not (as he pretends in his letter to that town) because it was his duty to accept those for which Paris had chosen him, but because he was now embedded in the political temper of the capital, a temper from which he could no longer escape, and which had absorbed the whole of his mind.

It was during this peaceable and monotonous advance that there fell upon the recollection and security of his new life the disturbance of the 20th of June; the flight of the royal family, their recapture, the long suspense that ended in the massacre of the Champ de Mars.

It is nearly always true of the great days of the Revolution, especially of the scenes in its earlier period, that they leave Robespierre aside. It is true of this as of

the rest. By an accident which fitted strangely well with his character, he had on that day of the 20th of June strolled out of Paris to enjoy the flattery and regrets of Versailles. When he returned to the city it was to find the uproar of consternation, the King's flight discovered; and to hear a word that, had he been at all of the stuff of those he led, would have illuminated his mind. Condorcet had pronounced the word "Republic."[1]

He returned to the Assembly in the early afternoon of the following day. He made a speech of no moment to the Jacobins in the evening, he added such a commonplace declaration as might be demanded of him, but admitted at least these picturesque words that he was "willing to be rid of the royal individual who cost forty millions."

When he came to be alone and with his friends he was altogether disturbed, and it was clear that he had lost his footing. For such men, who live in ideas rather than in their application, a continuity of the social medium is a necessity. They must, so to speak, find leisure in the constant habits of their environment, or their minds would be too much disturbed to follow out the ceaseless definitions of the intellect. The flight of the King shattered all the security and all the continuity which, after the first great change of base in '89, had continued for two years to mark the society in which the Revolution moved. If the King's object were to escape beyond the frontiers, and if he succeeded in that object, the whole State was put in the gravest peril, and the disturbing factor, which Robespierre was later to combat with such insistence, the advent of war, was made certain and immediate. Upon this scheme of a remo-

[1] There is an endless discussion as to who first spoke that word. A hundred had used it in their writings. I think Aulard has proved that it was first proposed to abolish monarchy in the drawing-room of the Condorcets.

delled state (to whose last touches he had so largely contributed and whose very design he had done so much to plan) was thrust the necessity, perhaps, of a whole reconstruction by the flight of the King. The machinery of the executive was dissolved. The checks with which the new situation was surrounded had for a moment disappeared. The constitutionals were made by this accident into bitter conservatives.

Pétion lived then in the Faubourg St. Honoré, beyond where the English embassy now stands. That afternoon, the afternoon of the 21st, Robespierre went round to his rooms during the short recess in the session of the Assembly. He met there (in company with Brissot), the future light of the Gironde, the woman who had come up to Paris five months before and who was already beginning to exercise upon the political society of the capital an influence which she retained till death; the wife of old Roland. It was in the presence of her form and attraction that this little committee of extremists debated the problem which the flight of the royal family had created.[1]

To the more square-built and deeper Pétion the solution was in that great name, "The Republic," which was to become in a short year an idol for all the people. Robespierre, with his little laugh, bit his nails nervously and asked once or twice, "What is a Republic?" France was not yet republican at all, and he was not the one to feel the magic of words. He took then the extreme leadership of indignation, but nothing more. The Parliament had refused to decide anything; had talked of "the King's abduction"; Robespierre turned from them to his special field, to the Jacobins, and that night put on an

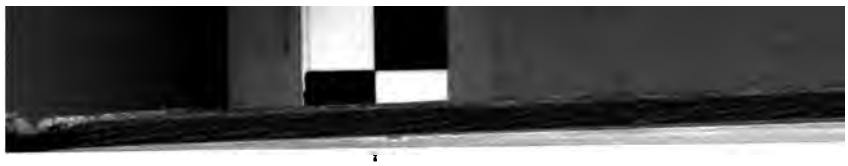
[1] On this passage Dumont is a common liar. Madame Roland is trustworthy upon facts, but upon tendencies and judgments embittered and biassed. See her "Memoirs," i. 298, 299 (1st edition).

attitude in the dim chapel,[1] to protect his ill-ease he lifted the shield of demagogy, and began that litany of himself which wearied and alienated within three years the more practical of his followers.

It was ten at night when he stood in the tribune of the club. The opportunities of the moment gave him daring; he impeached the confusion and the hesitation of the deputies and turned their meaningless phrase, "the abduction of the King," into an accusation of treason; then once more he exalted himself, and pretended that such clear words might lead him to his death. This false effect—for it can hardly have been other than consciously false—led to cheers. He stood up silent in a storm of praise. The ovation was witnessed by the ministers, by Bailly, by Lafayette, by all that from conviction, or doubt, or habit, were determined to use the occasion for the purposes of reaction. They entered at the moment his speech closed. It seemed as though the King's flight was to throw the two armies of opinion one at the other, and as though Robespierre would be found once for all in the camp against which Lafayette was determined to lead an assault with whatever he could gather of the armed militia he had so long commanded. Danton was there; in a violent and direct phrase he accused these men as they entered of treason, and he enveloped Robespierre in the armour of the Cordeliers: thrust him among the fighters. Next day that vision of immediate hostility was dispelled. It was learned that the royal family had been stopped, and were returning.

The word "Republic" was silenced, the old conditions reappeared, shaken and uncertain indeed, but still the only basis upon which political discussion could move. All retreated somewhat from the position of those violent three days, the reaction threatened less loudly; the

[1] The club had moved earlier in June from the library to the deserted chapel of the monastery.





democrats consented to resume the discussion of the Constitution.

There followed three weeks in which the angry discontent of the populace and the demand for the King's dismissal found none but chance and irresponsible leaders. That crisis ended in the presentation of the two petitions from the Cordeliers and from the Jacobins for the reconsideration of the position of the King: if you will, for his abdication or removal.

With the violence that was the outcome of that movement Robespierre is entirely dissociated. His name is continually mentioned as a leader by those who foresaw or who accelerated the approaching disaster, but he gives them no excuse for such an attitude.

When the second great Federation had, on the 14th of July, brought up its great crowds of provincial revolutionaries to the city, he could find nothing less cautious than the phrase, "As for monarchs, let them so act as to make monarchy respected." He took a personal and active part in preventing the Club, of which he was now almost the master, from attacking the principle of monarchy. He urged and succeeded in persuading them to have nothing to do with the petition.

The Federation had been held upon a Thursday. The Friday and Saturday he occupied in a determined effort to prevent extreme measures on the part of the malcontents; it was one of his moments of energy. Here, as later, during the debate on the war, he saw violence endangering the reconstruction which occupied every faculty of his mind. It was evident that the old régime was arming. The senile Vadier, that had babbled of republicanism, was a sign of the change. He babbled a recantation. The various forces of reaction, which had taken so long to gain cohesion and discipline, were now united, and were ready to attack at a signal the discipline, the secrecy, the universal presence of the

Jacobins. On the eve of the quarrel Robespierre again spoke decisively against the public presentation of the petition to depose the King, and caused the club to send deputies to withdraw their portion of that petition, which was already upon the altar of the Champs de Mars. The Parliament had declared the petition illegal. He would abide within the law. All this pronounced attitude of his might be summed up in the contemporary phrase of Brissot: "A law is passed, and we must obey it."

The moment was too critical for such reservations to produce their effect. The following day, Sunday, the 17th, at evening, when the sun was setting or had set, the excesses of the crowd, their murder of two vagrants whom they thought spies,[1] their defiance of the hasty decree which forbade the petition, their angry trooping to sign it, had led to the declaration of martial law. Bailly had appeared in the great empty plain where, three days before, the Federation had attempted to continue the traditions of unanimity and where the mound and altar in a lonely central place recalled the oath and upspringing of the preceding year. The conflict between Lafayette's militia and the populace had taken place, the women, children, and married men had fallen, and before it was yet dark the massacre of the Champs de Mars had opened the short and violent reaction, the weeks of insolence which proved but a preface for greater and more terrible reprisals of years.

That conflict determined a great change in the life of Robespierre. He left his loneliness in the Rue Saintonge, his vague popularity, his sacred distance, to enter into the familiar idolatry of one family; to be

[1] I use the phrase for shortness. It was not the crowd on the Champ de Mars who did this. It was the mob at the Gros Cailloux, whither the spies had been sent.

made, as it were, a god of one known temple, to direct from a single and famous centre his increasing power over the later fortunes of the reform.

If one would follow this transition, it is necessary to see him once more in the society of which he had become the spokesman.

The Jacobins were in session. In the flood of the reaction, in the victory of the conservatives, all but a handful of the politicians had already resigned their tickets: half-a-dozen alone remained, surrounded by the ordinary members. The impoverished club had met as usual after the dinner-hour, and as the long summer light was failing, and the candelabra were beginning to make shadows in the vaults and to show the gaps in the long benches of the nave, there came to its remnant of deputies,[1] with their great band of radical voters beside them, the news of what had passed at sunset on the Champs de Mars. Almost simultaneously with that passionate rumour they heard the loud cries of opponents without, and the clanking jostle of arms that goes with a mob of irregulars. The National Guard, the bourgeoisie in arms, were coming back east from their fatal error; a great group of them had passed, or been forced by the rush of the riotous return, out of the Rue St. Honoré into the irregular square that formed the entrance to the old hall of the convent. There they stood shouting and hooting for awhile against the radicals, and feeding by their insult the growing passion within.

The club had rarely tolerated tumult, especially at this stage of the reform. Extreme as it already was in

[1] Roederer, Robespierre, Buzot, Corroller, Boyer (the bishop), Pétion. All the other liberal deputies had seceded the day before, and formed what was afterwards known as "The Feuillants," that held their meeting in the convent over the way. Many returned later on the address which Robespierre himself drew up and presented in the name of the parent society.

principle, and fanatical as the wars were to make it in the near future, yet so far it had maintained a habit of composure. Its membership—it was for much the greater part made up of professional men—its sense of its own importance, the academic theses which it delighted to discuss, lent it an undue gravity, and preserved it from the habitual violence that was even then a feature of the Cordeliers, and that the invasion evoked later in every public meeting. But that night they gave way to a furious hubbub which proceeded at once from their indignation at the action of Lafayette, from the suddenness of the conflict, and the fear of the unknown in the darkness that immediately succeeded it. Their vehement anger was nourished by that mingling of impotence and confusion which of all things will most exasperate men met in numbers. It was they that had originated the petitions, yet it was they also that had withdrawn first and had counselled prudence. In a sense they felt themselves part authors of this tragedy; they only raged the more against the men and the policy whose stupidity had led to such a climax. Through the uproar, which drowned debate as the night deepened, Robespierre alone made his high voice heard. In a speech that has not come down to us, but whose manner and persistence were of the kind to which the club always listened, he put some measure to their excitement, and by half-past ten or thereabouts, aided by the exhaustion and curiosity of his audience, he had reduced the fire to embers; before eleven the chapel was emptying, the members rising from their benches. Madame Roland, who had been present at this meeting, bethought herself of Robespierre as she sat at home surrounded by the growing terrors of the crisis. She went, or says she went,[1] up into the Rue Saintonge in the Marais to offer

[1] A little inconsistently, since she also says in her "Memoirs" that, at the same hour, she was refusing shelter to Robespierre's early friend,

him asylum in her house; but she tells us that when she got to his door, somewhat before midnight, he had not yet returned. In this she is truthful, though she is wrong in ascribing terror to a man who was as ignorant of panic as of valour. What had happened was this.

There was in the meeting at the Jacobins a man called Duplay. A Highlander from Auvergne, ruddy, tall, and strong, though verging upon age; a master carpenter by trade, of some property, an owner of horses, and a type of the older generation. He had welcomed the Revolution as the climax of the theories that had entertained his class and its superiors for a lifetime. His ready and simple mind had found in the oratory of Robespierre the same quality of expression that took captive then and for years the middle classes of the capital. Duplay's single devotion to those few and fundamental political ideas which were the main interest of his life, made him a kind of devotee of the speaker who presented them with such clearness, and whose narrow deductions never wandered by an inch from their guidance. Moved as much by charity as by this distant hero-worship, he came to the rescue of his idol, seeing in him a man who would not comprehend the risks which that evening had produced. And in this he was an acute observer, for Robespierre in the great crises of his life, partly from excessive introspection, partly from a natural inaptitude to grasp reality, was blind alike to opportunity and to danger. He stood beside the door as Robespierre was making to go out, told him his name, and begged him to hide, if only for that night, in his house. The younger man was persuaded, and followed him.

The street was full of menace; the terror of the short reaction was already weighing upon Paris. The mode-

Madame Robert, on the plea that her house was too well known by Lafayette's faction.

rates and the strong tories were thoroughly allied; the alliance was still numerous and powerful; it had used its weapons and had won its first skirmish; the National Guard could be relied upon. They thought, perhaps, that they were winning a campaign, and with the feverish haste of uncertain men, the mere six hours after the command to fire were long enough to give birth to a complete policy. They could not see that they had but pulled the first trigger in a civil war, that wounded mothers bringing in dead children were to furnish the arguments of the future, and that in two years poor Bailly himself was to meet death in the rain on the spot where he had given his orders to the Guard. For the moment the reaction had won. Danton was in flight, soon to be off on that short unknown visit to England.[1] Desmoulins had thrown down his pen, and of all the group none were in greater danger than Robespierre.

Duplay hurried him westward along the Rue St. Honoré till they had nearly reached its end and stopped at last where the short Rue St. Florentin comes in from the south. Here on the north side of the street was a house which the lamp of the opposite opening picked out against the night.[2] They passed through a wide archway into the outer courtyard, where great stacks of planks and lumber, a saw-pit, and a shed, marked Duplay's trade, and saw at the farther end of the paved quadrangle a lower house connected by a wing with the front upon the street.

A light shone in the windows; they entered to find the wife and her two young daughters waiting anxiously to receive the master safe from the club on this night of clamour. He introduced his guest and they offered him a sanctuary, remembering his growing name. So, a little

[1] Of which I can find nothing save a mention in some private notes communicated to me by a friend that he lived in Greek Street, Soho.

[2] See note 3 at the end of this book.

before midnight on this his first introduction to peril, he came under the roof which (with one trifling interval) was to be his home for three years of an unimagined fame, and on which he was to turn his eyes—so far as blood would let him—in the last hours of his life as he approached the neighbouring scaffold.

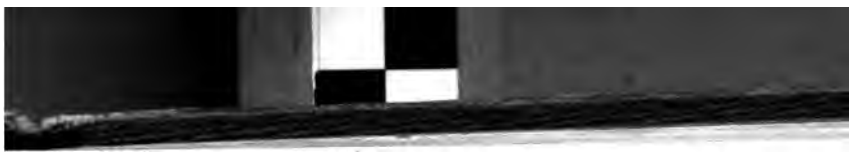
# CHAPTER V

## THE WAR

THE year between the domestic victory of Lafayette and the fall of the monarchy is a labyrinth or a crucible. There passes into it and is lost, all of that first reform which was imagined to have achieved finality; there emerges from it the high exaltation of the Republic. The Constitution of 1791, "which might be revised, but not for thirty years,"[1] was a vast reconstruction: the decent tradition of Europe cleared of excrescence; suited to the philosophy of the time; made normal. It was full of detail; its multitudinous parts had received the exact attention of lawyers; statesmen had debated its checks and balances. The spirit of '93 was a creation, or at the least the resurrection of some infinite past in the race; it had the simplicity and the violence of a religion, its consequence and propaganda, called by a thousand names, are the leavening ferment of the modern world. What was the nature of the maze in which the sober commonplaces of the leisured were lost (they have not reappeared), and of what kind was the chemistry which fused the old elements into this prime matter of equality? Two contemporaneous accidents answer this question: the Great War and the nature of the new Parliament.

Of the war I shall deal in its place. It was the governing condition that dominated the mind of Europe; we are altogether its heirs. But the war would not have fulfilled the plan of history, nor have given rise to the

[1] The decree of 31st August 1791. On this decree an historian has passed the commentary, "Oh, human decisions, how frail ye are!"





spectacle of democracy had it not in its origin contended against forces so complex and so resistant as to provoke an intense activity. The Revolution was compelled to develop energies hitherto unknown in degree and surpassing the line that bounds experience. The dense medium that so compelled it to call up new things, was furnished by the constitutional contrasts of 1791. I would therefore detail at some length what kind of discrepancies the Legislative Assembly displayed, nor will the description, though tedious, be found irrelevant, for it explains the continued increase of Robespierre.

The Legislative Assembly appears at first sight to be but the natural successor of the Constituant. Accustomed in our modern politics to the regular procession of parliaments, we see the second Assembly coming in natural order after the dissolution of the first; it is more democratic, because the general march of the nation is towards democracy, it proceeds to certain extremes, it declares war. The conservative elements of 1789–1791 disappear during the year of the Legislative. At last, again in a natural order, the term of its powers introduces in 1792 a third, and yet more extreme, Assembly, openly Republican, proceeding through the Terror to delirium, and finally to exhaustion in 1794. Such is the picture that the three Parliaments of the Revolution call up if they be examined superficially, and the Legislative appears in them as a natural link between the orderly hope of the Constituant and the prophetic fury of the Convention. But the picture is false. Not only was the spirit of the Legislative Assembly a tangle far more complex than that of a simple progression towards democracy, but the very causes of the dilemma of 1792 and of the passion that followed its solution in war and insurrection lay buried at the heart of that tangle.

In the first place, the Legislative Assembly was an anachronism. The electoral colleges which chose it were

themselves elected precisely at the moment when the King seemed—not without violence—to have been limited to his functions under the Constitution; for they were elected in early June before the flight to Vincennes. Nor were the electoral colleges even permitted to elect when the shock of the King's desertion had followed immediately upon their formation. Monarchist though they were, that blunder (had they proceeded to vote as the regulations demanded, in the last days of June) might have led them to the choice of men more determined or more violent than would earlier have suited their taste. The sharp definitions of the crisis might have created a clear national policy. As it was, the meeting of the electoral colleges was postponed till the 5th of August. Before that date Lafayette had won, and their choice was exercised in the extreme of the great reaction. In a word then, the Legislative which, upon a national and universal suffrage would have been almost a Republican Assembly, was falsified not only by a restricted franchise, nor only by indirect election, but also and especially by the revolution in opinion which lay between the moment of its origin and that of its first exercise of power.

In the second place, the Legislative suffered in a higher degree than any other product of the Reform, from a divorce between its theoretical and its actual functions. It is a note of the whole Revolution that while its philosophy presupposed the peace and level of an absolutely normal state, the wild adventures in the midst of which it was compelled to act were abnormal in the extreme. A scientific accuracy in the delimitation of every new political power or commercial standard, an almost geometrical analysis of the commonwealth and a precise mechanical arrangement of all society—the whole based upon the tolerance and enlightenment of men secure in liberty—these acts of precision so roused and armed the love of ancient custom and the sad postulates of religion,

that not only every foreign, but many domestic interests openly challenged the change. War, rhetoric and even demagogy became the necessary methods whereby was defined and achieved a system whose object had been only peace and whose foundation lay in the cold abstractions of science. The period teems with the ironic contrast of just, or rather self-evident, decrees and the most enormous and violent illegalities. The Legislative was elected to carry out steadily in detail the Constitution whose general spirit had been defined in the preceding two years—it discovered the task of a European war. It was designed to argue points with the executive and to define the remaining petty doubts upon the exact power of the Crown—it found that Crown, and the executive dependent on it, actively intriguing with rebels and foreign enemies to destroy the Revolution. It was given the mission of an attorney and found itself compelled to the career of a soldier. This anomaly disturbed every issue in the year that saw the first invasion: it divided the counsels of the nation, shattered its internal unity, and raised up before the French the thing that bewilders and maddens a community—a danger hidden and elusive, enemies in the night. They could no longer be certain of their weapons or their authority. The people fell into an anarchy of doubt and violence, and there proceeded from this confusion of concealed powers a suspicion that became coextensive with the whole national life; a terror that haunted, poisoned, and came very near to destroying France.

But a third more tangible evil affected the twelve months during which this Parliament endured. The nation was no longer legally led by its principal men. The general impatience with a false and uncertain guidance, the popular action that consequently arose outside and against the government are the chief causes of the position which Robespierre assumed at this period.

This therefore is the chief mark of the year: that because a decree forbade the re-election of Members of the last Parliament, the clubs, the old leaders of the first year, the established reputations—all France—worked as it were in spite of the Parliament. Thus the nation thought itself able to neglect the deputies and thus arose among the revolutionaries that disastrous rivalry between the politicians that were within and those that were without the walls of the new Assembly. This rivalry at last became the quarrel of the Mountain and the Gironde.

There is this great weakness attaching to government by representation, that it presupposes an eminence in those elected. Direct mandate and delegation are justly the theory of a special crisis, but the general life of any deliberative assembly is necessarily senatorial; for who can be at the pains of evoking the General Will of his constituents at every five minutes of the working day, or what General Will however lively could stand the strain of so frequent a resurrection? If therefore the senate is discovered to be composed of very mediocre men and if the commerce, science and military grades of a nation have their leaders elsewhere, there must fall upon it the contempt and impotence that always go with a discrepancy between authority and power. It is true that some nations attempt to evade this danger by a sublime fiction and pretend to see in the deputy something other than the man himself, making him, as it were, a being whose very ordinary exterior conceals an inspired genius. The price of this comfortable superstition is a tangle of anomalous laws, a lethargy in the action of government, the exhaustion of wealth, military disaster and a gradual decline.

There is no space for me to enter here into the discussion of this vice in parliaments, a vice which has succeeded in weakening their consideration throughout the modern

world. It is enough for the purpose of this book to point out that the disaster of possessing a representative assembly below the height of its mission has been avoided for great spaces of time in a variety of ways: by so framing the machinery of election as to make it correspond with the hierarchy of excellence that everywhere exists, by providing through the criticism of permanent officials some test for the ability of the elected, and so forth. In the Revolution, the French people whose passion for municipal affairs, whose strict and centralised homogeneity, and whose general level of intelligence fit them ill for the parliamentary system, were upon two great occasions well served in the accident of election. The Constituant Assembly of 1789, proceeding from every corporate body and consulting local patriotism, had collected in one place the talent and energy of the nation; the Convention of 1792, springing as it were from the inspiration of a people in arms, or rather at bay, gathered what was most powerful and most ready in the new spirit of the wars and discovered a common enthusiasm wherewith to transform for the moment its most insignificant members. In either case an exceptional occasion of supreme interest to all produced for France an exceptional success in a political method of which she has always divined the fallacy and suspected the oligarchic and corrupt tendencies.

The Legislative had no such fortune. The resolution of the 18th of May which forbade re-election, typical as it was of that theoretical calm against which every circumstance cried out, might have suited Utopia or a small republic at peace: it was fatal to France in 1791. The tried men, the standard-bearers of the sects, the very buffoons who were the foil to such dignity, were excluded from the Parliament. Barnave, off, marrying himself in Grenoble; Cazalès wandering in England; Barrère silent; the Abbé Maury half in hiding; Bailly retired to

Nantes, were so many landmarks of public attention withdrawn. As for the members who remained in activity their popularity or public effect still further weakened the moral authority of the Parliament. Siéyès was working and publishing in the conservative and high assembly called the Department of Paris; Robespierre was the public prosecutor-elect of Paris, a leader and master in the Jacobins; Desmoulins was the chief pamphleteer of the advance; Lafayette was again a general on service, soon to be in command of the frontier; strong Pétion was the mayor of Paris.

Thus whatever France had come to regard as the political world was standing apart, conducting its own campaigns. The Parliament upon which was to fall the task of resolution and action in the face of Europe seemed at its origin to be separate and to suffer from insignificance; later it appeared dependent on the clubs. Were it my business (which, thank Heaven, it is not) to write down here the 745 names of those who composed it, readers fully acquainted with the Revolution might recognise a dozen; the rare students who have examined every detail of the period might pretend to the knowledge of some thirty; those whose general education has been supplemented by some reading upon the period would be arrested by four or perhaps five names—they would see Vergniaud, Carnot, Condorcet, Herault de Séchelles . . . Couthon . . . Brissot.

So far a general thesis of inevitable monotony has occupied my description of this transition. It has been necessary to introduce it in order to show on what new platform Robespierre was to stand. Freed from the discipline and general talent of the Assembly, segregated, a unique figure, already in public office, having for his centre of effort a small and highly favourable debating hall—everything conspired to "set" him, as it were, in the framing that suited him best. Some few knew well, he himself had not yet begun to suspect, that the isola-

tion of a nascent idolatry, the new pedestal that cut him off from experience, were to falsify his popularity, to lead him where he would not go, and at last, in '94, exhaust him altogether. (No man can feed upon himself; these repetitive and single-sided men least of all.)

This mixture of isolation and of power is the story of Robespierre during all that autumn and winter of 1791–92: a power wholly unfruitful—as suited him—an isolation that belonged not only to the height of the tribune of the Jacobins or to the silence of an audience, but to the profound variance between his views upon foreign policy and those of general opinion. Nowhere is the paradox of his career more startling than now, when his very opposition but confirms the public trust in his probity. His ignorance of the great rising that is covering all France but emphasise the abstraction, and (as was thought) the profundity of his faith. He counted more and more with the Jacobins, and therefore with the Revolution, because he seemed to care less than nothing for their bias of the moment. They made him, as it were, an anchor for what they knew to be changeable in themselves. They swung to him as ships swing to their moorings in a strong tide-way.

Consider the decline of 1791, and the thoughts of which the peasantry, the citizens, the salons—all that lived outwardly—were full as the days shortened into the winter darkness and the fate of war. The peasantry had bought the Church land; even now it was ploughing. The under-quarrel of the priest and the schismatic had pierced through the enveloping verbiage with which it had as yet been covered, and the ceaseless vitality of religion had reappeared to startle all that philosophy of the pedantic rich. Reason, standing single, had shrivelled in the flame that came up out of nature against it. There was no "civil" church, there was no "Gallican" establishment—there was nothing save Catholicism seeking its enemy: the master-error of the early Revolution was discovered.

It had thought to have given decent guarantees to a superstition dying, and it found it had insulted a religion whose intensity increased with time. From this crisis there arose the first threat of the civil war. To take but the clergy as an example. While half the clergy mourned their country in silence, half saw nothing of moment either in country or freedom but only in the Church of God. In such a passion dogma and theology, that are as abstract and as deductive as the Revolution itself (it is their child), were forgotten; the concrete objects of the moment seemed all in all. For instance, Avignon, on which a thousand jests had passed for ages, which Catholicism had forgotten, became in an hour a sacred ground. It was an island in France, an historical absurdity, an inheritance of the Papacy's degradation and corruption, a memory of enslavement, something to be bought out—no matter, it was sacred ground. The mere demand for the civic oath, the mere proclamation of the reunion with French soil, led to the massacre of Lescoyer at the altar—a massacre directed by women. On that news, the Frenchmen of the old city felt a small implacable thing menacing the unity of the nation and their liberty: they killed it. The Tower of the Glacière, a bastion of that castle which seems a rock and is huge enough to hold all the dead bodies of the middle ages, was filled with their victims. And to this one chief disaster a hundred menaces attached throughout the kingdom. In the Cevennes the villages fought faction fights of Heretic and Catholic; in Vendée and in Brittany the churches were seized from the schismatics; at Caen, right in the town, a schismatic priest had been thrown from his office at the very altar.

The agony of a divided allegiance worked on and infuriated the public mind. France Catholic had bought the land of the establishment, and the heart of France is in the land. The peasant, who had made all the elder

saints and half the ritual, clung sullenly to his possessions. "By our Lady," he had a right to his purchase: all his gods confirmed him.

France, atheist, refined and vicious, the pestilence of the eighteenth century, was suddenly become a sound fanatic. Lord! how evil was this Revolution, how blasphemous! The little marquises at Coblenz and at Turin were astonished at the licence of manners. Catherine of Russia was all chastity, chivalry, and would help Gustavus of Sweden, a Quixote of Marie Antoinette's; fleets were to be sent to the coasts of Brittany by those admirable devotees of celibacy.

Thus when this religious war was conceived, all the nation was in a turmoil. With the exception of that very small minority—the refined agnostics of the governing classes, the rare and the isolated mountain villages where Protestantism was still a social force—there was no one in whom the old religion, dwindled to indifference, did not knock at the heart: yet there was hardly any one either (save in some definitely rebel districts) who did not painfully refuse to attack the Revolution, and feel some indignation at the honest fanaticism of the clerical Revolt. This tearing apart of the affections led to every violence and embittered every phrase, for nearly every man became a kind of enemy to his own childhood; such evil had the self-sufficiency of the Constituant Assembly and the blunder of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy already achieved.

But in the rising storm, see how little Robespierre comprehended. He had maintained his friendly connection with his friends in the Church; he had made a speech or two in mild defence of the clergy, treating the whole matter by the light of his principles, seeing in religion at least some necessary dogmas, and in the priest a puzzling citizen. The mustering for civil war he still took for a calm field in which he might sow his theories.

In the very days when the awful tragedy of the Glacière was acted in the crossways of the South, he was off on a triumphal tour to his province, to greet his brother and sister at Arras, to be drawn in his carriage by the citizens, to be delighted at the illumination of the town in his honour, to receive a civic crown for himself and for the absent Pétion (whose name was so often coupled with his own), to rest in a local glory from what had certainly been the devoted labour of two wonderful years. It would not be just to say that he saw nothing of the religious ferment, but the very rarity and insignificance of his allusions to it heightens the impression of unreality which this passage in his life conveys. He goes to call upon an old friend, a connection of that Abbey of St. Waast under whose shadow he had played as a child, and of that good bishop, De Conzié, who had befriended his youth. He is coldly received and wonders why! He hears of a miracle in some church or other of the town (a lame man hearing the mass of a non-juring priest threw down his crutches and walked); he mentions the matter in a letter to Paris,[1] not with indignation nor with doubt, but with a tolerant and commonplace irony, the faint echo of Voltaire: such a comment as might have slipped into some satirical verse or other at the Rosati, years before the Revolt.

All the long debâte of October, the fierce decrees of November, sent powerful reverberations throughout the provinces. The Assembly was being led at last. Young men from the South had given that inchoate, unknown body of youth a voice; the steady flame of Vergniaud, the gusts of Isnard were creating the influence which was later to be called the "Gironde." It was just before Robespierre's departure that Gensonné had presented his report upon the condition of the West, showing how far the religious quarrel had proceeded.

[1] Written to Duplay on the 17th of October.

It was the day after his return to Paris (the 29th of November) that the Assembly passed the violent decree which covered the Church with the first shadow of the Terror.

His absence therefore exactly corresponded with the crisis which first in all the revolutionary movement caused the French to step outside equality and reason and to initiate exceptional laws. Yet he said nothing of it either in his speeches at Béthune (in which sad town a second ovation awaited him)[1] nor in his letters home. Fauchet, the constitutional Bishop of Caen, had asked for extreme measures; Forné, who held a similar office in Bourges, who modelled himself upon Robespierre,[2] had said everything in favour of leniency. Isnard in a manner magnificent and terrible, but touching upon fanaticism, had called the whole movement rebellion (which it was) and had passed the extreme of violence when he said, "No God but the Law," when he shouted that no trial and no witnesses were needed against manifest insurrection (November 14). The committee had closed its sitting, the decree passed. The civic oath was to be administered to the refractory clergy within a week; a refusal made the refuser suspect. He could be domiciled at discretion; if he disobeyed an order as to his domicile he could be imprisoned for a year. This violent climax, a decision which the Crown vetoed, ended the first phase of the religious quarrel.

One indication only of what he might have said at the Jacobins, had he not chosen such a time as suitable for a visit to his native place, we have in his letter to that club, and the occasion of it is a whole commentary

[1] To those who are acquainted with this town it may be interesting to hear that he stopped at the sign of the Golden Oak.

[2] This man was one of the many who had an idolatry for Maximilian. He was a don of the University of Toulouse; between sixty and seventy years of age, and mad.

upon his continual attitude towards Catholicism: an entry into his mind. It was upon the 9th of November, just when the debate hung even, that Condorcet published in his paper, the *Courrier de Paris*, a supposed letter of Robespierre's. It declared that no principle of toleration should apply "to the faith that is intolerant of all others." Condorcet was deceived; indeed he only gave the letter as "an extract communicated to him"; but it did not need Robespierre's immediate and vigorous denial to establish the falsity of the letter. It was opposed to all he had said or thought during his whole political life. What is remarkable, then, is not that it was perceived to be an error on the part of the *Courrier*, but that Robespierre should have sent so immediately[1] an emphatic, angry denial, to be read by Couthon, his friend, to the club when it was still turbulent with the conquering eloquence of Isnard. It meant that he still held absolutely in the close of 1791 to the principles that had seemed to him all-sufficient in 1789. Michelet has called his attitude throughout this initial year a trafficking with the priests, a determination to rely upon them in the future. It was nothing of the kind. It was simply the necessary consequence of logic in a mind that had not yet formed any plan of ambition, and that was as absolute and restricted as a mathematical identity. To no man (this letter said) could a question be asked of right upon his opinions, nor a punishment be inflicted for a true answer, nor should any be constrained to follow this or that declaration of faith or discipline.

If he had been all but silent upon the religious quarrel, he was entirely so upon a matter that yet might have given him much more opportunity for discussion, and that worked in the new debates parallel with the

[1] It must have been despatched the moment the post reached the north, and have been a hot answer by return, for there are but five days between the printing of the sheet and the arrival of his denial.

question of the priests. This matter was the question of the emigration. He had spoken already in the earlier months of the year defending the right of all to come and go. I cannot but believe that if he neither wrote one word nor on his return made one allusion to the great debate on the proscription of the emigrants it was because he still clung to that absolute and useless principle of peaceful firmness. On this again he was directly opposed to the popular feeling, but far more certainly than in the dilemma of the religious insurrection. The emigrants were (for the most part) frank traitors. There was no hypocrisy or mincing; they were willing to fight in defence of something superior to the nation—the feudal class of Europe. When the man whose fierce name recurs like a chorus throughout these scenes, Isnard again, come from a dry place, the harsh deserts of the Rhone, Isnard, "the wind of Africa," had startled all the Assembly with a truth, France was solid in applause. For he had said, "I ask this Assembly and France . . . and *you*, sir!"—to a startled noble that had groaned—"whether any one will maintain that these men are not plotting against their country;" he flamed into menace, talked of "the punishments of the people that resemble the punishments of God, since they work when the laws are silent." All that cavalry charge of his raised the Assembly to its feet. Its echo struck the Jacobins. A decree passed that the emigrants were to return at the New Year, or to be liable to confiscation and death. Robespierre, by speech to his surrounders in the north, and to his Paris home by letter, remained unapplauding.[1]

But I would not convey of this man, even in the preparatory time of mere applause, when he had not yet

[1] The answer of Monsieur to this decree is worth recalling: "In the name of all common sense, book i., section i., article i., chapter i., paragraph i., come back to your right minds."

approached the responsibility of power, an impression only of nullity and of the dry bones of thought. The stamp which he has left upon history is far too profound for such a judgment to be true. His convictions, though they were but individual, pierced and acted; when these convictions agreed with some practical conclusion, he was full of argument, of application, and of judgment.

This power or talent, which, as I say, appeared when some matter congenial to him had been matured by others for his reception, and when his mind (that commonly worked in a void) was given something real which it could grasp, was very rapidly developed, and was perhaps publicly appreciated for the first time when the Jacobins began their great debate upon the war.

From this moment Robespierre, who had been brought out from utter obscurity by the days of October, who had been given the first honours of debate in 1790, whom the death of Mirabeau had left with an exaggerated glory, and whom for six months the prestige of the Jacobins and the popular suffrage had still further advanced, passed into the public mind as a man capable of administration. He had pursued a policy, and presented a combined plan—much later, by incessant degrees, he was to attempt the executive function, and by a fatal error born of the blind energy of '93, the satisfaction of that ambition was to be granted him.

He had returned upon the 25th of November to find a full tide going the way of the democrats; Pétion was elected mayor, Manuel was clerk, Danton his vicegerent; extreme decrees had passed the Assembly by great majorities or unanimity. The petty fellow that a certain false kind of history would make him out to be would have drifted in such a torrent. (But how can a man drift when the centre of his universe is in himself?)

Robespierre in the midst of this overwhelming tendency continued to develop his particular thesis.

In Paris he found an insistent cry for war. There had come to the minds of all the moral certainty that attack was impending, that the only defensive was to strike. This instinct had impelled the city, was obtaining the provinces, on his return. He opposed it. His principal barrier was Isnard.

This man, who resembled in his meagre and direct expression, in the light of his eyes and in his dark countenance and rapid balance of words the principal orators of America; who had in his spirit much of Jefferson or (to pass to the other pole), in his inspiration, a cousinship with Lincoln, was presiding at the Jacobins. A sword had been laid on the table by the tribune. He had accepted and embraced the sword. That sword[1] was the symbol of a crusade. He demanded war, and all France was ready to follow. The frenzy that can drive an assembly to the ridiculous had captured all the chapel when Robespierre came up, collected, into the tribune. Looking up at the public galleries with the same destructive calm that had marked all his attitude for the year, changing his glasses for reading, he turned to his speech as to a task and declaimed his list of suspicions against the policy of war.

Like so many of his public appeals, it has the length and tedium of a little book. For a solid hour it must have detained the club with its consecutive logic and with its occasional literary excellence; yet these wearying pages which a modern can scarcely complete were thought sublime. The Jacobins, whose majority continued to support Brissot with his cry for an immediate offensive, yet voted the printing of this speech, and one might see in the paradox of that vote all the

[1] Presented, I believe, by an American.

future success that lay before Robespierre. They were devoted to him beyond the necessities of agreement.[1]

Two forces in him gave him this personal ascendancy over the club, and, through the club, over the elections of the next year, and through them at last over the nation. The first was his one talent; a talent supremely important in the Revolution: he could manage a debate. He led on his audience continually, not always to the immediate triumph of his thesis, but invariably to a support and applause of himself; he never passed the limit of what popularity may dare. He supported the most uncongenial proposition by a repetition of the cardinal principles which were the religious dogmas of the time and the invariable provokers of applause. Nor did the revolutionaries ever rise from some speech of his without experiencing the dangerous and useless satisfaction which proceeds from listening to the public utterance of our most cherished commonplaces. All through the debates which culminated in the speech of the 18th of December this suppleness, his continual reticence of phrase, mark his long fence with the Parliament, the war-party, the Gironde. He spared persons, he praised a defensive preparation, he laid emphasis on the disloyalty of the executive, he connected the whole of his arguments and made them depend upon the texts of the time. But he opposed war.

And the second force was tenacity. This quality has upon the French in their political efforts an irresistible success, and if it is generally admirable in their eyes it becomes a kind of heroic virtue when the national character is intensified by some common danger. The consistency they seek in themselves, the base of conviction which is necessary to their exact deductions, they will always seek and sometimes imagine in a leader. Here in Robespierre it was tangible. He

[1] The speech is in the journals of the society, Nos. 110, 111.

seemed to be their creed in person. They heard him, after the great voice of Vergniaud, the new storm of Isnard, the rising name of Guadet, still reasoning coldly and coming to his own conclusions unmoved. In the face of all Germany arming and of the preaching of civil war within, he could still repeat the old truths concerning the danger that standing armies are to liberty. This attitude which we now condemn because it palls on us the French then thought sublime, because such commonplaces were the reiteration of their safeguards. He did not gain majorities for his contention, but he finally confirmed the public faith in himself.

Robespierre, then, at the head of a conquering opinion in general politics, yet stood alone, or nearly alone, on the one thing that mattered, combating the war and, among men who idolised him chiefly for his extremes, combating enthusiasm. When loyalty to the nation was synonymous with loyalty to political freedom and when every force that could excite the best minds — the avengement of insult, the strength that is impatient of challenge, the vision of free states throughout Europe, by which dream the Revolution lived—made straight for war, he passionless, stood out. It might be imagined that this isolation was fruitless in history. On the contrary, it had the highest effect upon the next two years. It preserved the Jacobins. He created, not indeed a mass of votes within them, but a nucleus in which resided their peculiar spirit: a very powerful political body lay entrenched outside the Parliament, the permanent opposition of its leader to the principal policy of the Legislative Assembly gave a strength to all those irregular forces upon which—when the war and the defeats came—the salvation of the Revolution was to depend. The extremists had opposed war. When the war turned ill they had all the more right to direct it to success.

This opposition and its increasing value is best seen

by following the sequence of events and the political adventures that, in the following three months, led up to the war.

The great debate on the war at the Jacobins closed upon the 25th of January. It had lasted two months, and had determined the fate of the Revolution more certainly than had the intrigues of the Court or the growing enthusiasm of the Parliament. For the club had now covered all France with its affiliated societies, and the vast body thus formed was a strict unity, organised, centralised, and moving like an army at command. It possessed the force which the Constitution of 1791 had removed from politics, which the temper of the Girondins suspected and destroyed authority, discipline whereby alone things corporate achieve individuality and can exercise a single will. The Jacobins, not by voting for war (they presumed to no such decrees), but by emphasising throughout France the danger in which France lay, by urging the volunteers, by increasing the suspicion against the Court, and especially by the openness and publicity of their debates, had created the war. It was at this moment, with the opening of the new year, that the violent exaltation of spirit which the battles were destined to fix in permanence began to appear under the guidance of the club and to show itself in a mass of symbolism of ritual phrases and of sublime absurdities. The occasional red cap of the peasantry began to be worn for liberty in the debates, pikes were forged as though the spears of the armies of romance still had a use among guns, the King had become nothing but "the executive power," and every speech seemed to presuppose an imaginary and epic world. There had risen a gale of great adventures.

This period had seen, also, all the decisive steps. The King's secret letter to his brother-in-law of Austria, the lover's stroke whereby Madame de Staël had forced

her Narbonne, dainty, graceful and confused, into the ministry of war, his foolish boastful report that seemed to take for granted the opening of a campaign, lastly (on the very day that closed the debate at the Jacobins) the threat launched against Leopold by the Assembly—all these had established the platform upon which the agitation for immediate hostilities rose. Throughout so rapid and constructive a change Robespierre had remained immovable, repeating in his last protest the spirit and the very phrases of his first. Yet throughout the two months he had been politic in the extreme: watching his audience, even in the chair yielding to rebuke, and by a quality that was inherent to a character that never left his mind, avoiding every personal encounter and every reproach of private malice.

Now because men of Robespierre's temper are so rare, or perhaps because they so rarely achieve power, his story in February and March 1792 has misinterpreted him before history. It makes him seem absorbed in a personal quarrel, and, despairing of his political ambition, wasting himself in an attack against the chief of his conquerors. Brissot was politically at the head of the movement for war; Brissot was the link that bound the republicans of the salons to the new band of young orators from the Gironde; Brissot was to make the ministry that declared hostilities against Austria. When therefore it is seen how Robespierre follows him persistently, like an enemy, and when Brissot in turn is seen watching Robespierre as the chief opponent of his plans, there is read into this antagonism a common quarrel of disappointed vanity jealous of success. The reading is erroneous. It would link up the past of Robespierre and his future, both evidently those of a man lost in abstractions, by a very real and living interest: it leads his biographers into a dozen inconsistencies; and especially distorts the judgment of

Michelet, who has to present in 1792 a little morose offended figure full of bitterness against the Gironde, and fixed wholly against their chief as a personal enemy and yet in 1793 defending them from death, in 1794 so removed from actuality as to fall before a conspiracy whose persons his political ideal forbade him to attack. Robespierre's struggle with Brissot, which is the contemporary commentary upon the declaration of war and which interprets as it originates the fatal division of 1793, stands congruous with the character and circumstances of both men, and is capable of being presented as an explanation of their future fortunes.

Close on forty, short, lean, stooping a little in his rapid gait, intelligent, over-active, Brissot had travelled, heard, seen, read widely and become divided during this great movement that was so well suited to his varied if restricted powers, between the absorbing interest of political intrigue and the defence of those principles to which he was sincerely attached. All that ennobles youth, the resistance to circumstance, the persistent following of a high ideal, the refusal to abandon personal restraint and dignity in the stress of poverty, had been absent from his past. Born somewhere of some one in the dull Beauce, coming to Paris a famished boy-lawyer, he had parried off starvation with a supple, too facile and somewhat unscrupulous pen, a bohemian sojourn in England, an abolitionist tour in the United States, a few weeks in the Bastille, had crammed him with every passing volatile or ignoble experience. He became one of those many to whom Orleans offered a disdainful protection, had been married to one of the dependents of the Palais Royal and had entered the Revolution by its least reputable door. For all this slime of doubtful adventures and self-betraying journalism, he was well fitted for the Reform. He was devoted to and inspired by the omnipresent genius of Rousseau; he could boast the

compliments of Voltaire; he had a sound judgment of men and of history; he possessed to a very high degree that talent in the arrangement and mixing of characters, which is the menial and servile necessity of all effective parliamentary action. Ardently patriotic, a clear thinker and a framer of consistent policies, he erred in his appetite for intrigue. He had sold his reputation in youth for food, he never sold his principles for wealth. Now, when so much depended upon him, when he could overthrow and form a ministry and was even supposed to hold the patronage of the minor offices, his shiny black coat and little meagre apartment confessed a poverty above which he took no kind of pains to rise; for he was childless and satisfied with power alone. This man, whose description already accounts for half the antagonism which existed between him and the clear, vague Puritanism of Robespierre, widened the gulf between his party and the extremists of the Mountain by in part supporting the superiority, and wholly directing the power, of a social class in Paris which, as we shall see, established the dates and details of the war policy though it could not claim to have produced it.

All this upper-class Republicanism, later called the Gironde, was by nature opposed to that for which Robespierre stood in the Revolution and which just before his fall he imagined to have erected into the religion of an ideal state. It is true that he was vain and that the dream in which his mind held itself constantly remote from reality was full of his own image, prophet and seer of the new world. But it is not true that merely his offended vanity and the sight of others achieving power oppressed him. It was the idea, the colour of the gradual Girondin success that moved him to a ceaseless and vigilant opposition. Men of this kind, fanatical in conviction, unobservant of details, never fail to group in a common condemnation whatever different

things may be opposed to their ideal. They miss complexity; and therefore Robespierre seeing so many forces at work, all apparently inimical to each other, yet all sinning against his fixed religion, took to imagining plots, conspiracies and secret alliances that had no existence. He was right indeed in his intuitive conviction that the Court was actively allied with Austria and sooner or later would force on the invasion by which it hoped to be saved. But he was utterly wrong in the imagination that Narbonne was but a masque for Lafayette and that all the varied mass of reaction lay beneath the leadership of the Gironde. I repeat, the quarrel was not personal upon Robespierre's side; it was an attack on the whole social complexion of the Gironde. Desmoulins indeed, who was then Robespierre's man, rounded upon Brissot with a pamphlet whose awful wit ate like an acid for a year into the dominant party, undermined them and led them at last to the scaffold; but the voice was Desmoulins' own. Robespierre in each of his frequent speeches was as innocent of personal attack as he was incapable of personal appreciation.

It was by the following steps that Brissot saw approaching and helped to introduce the war. Within a fortnight of the close of the debate at the Jacobins, the alliance between Prussia and Austria was concluded: upon the 7th of February. The Court knew it. The alliance was the work much more of Russia seeking a free hand in Poland than of Louis or his wife. It meant no immediate hostilities; on the contrary it contained clauses expressly framed for delay. The brother of Marie Antoinette was also the son of Marie-Thérèse, and the tradition of the Hapsburgs, the play of many strings whereby that family depend upon the dissensions of Europe as athletes upon their apparatus, was strong in the mind of Leopold. He had more interests to watch than the issue of the debates in Paris, and it was with a sincere desire to

temporise that, while sending a general in case the archbishopric should be attacked, he yet ordered the Elector of Treves[1] to disband the *émigrés*. But the alliance—the first definite act since Pilnitz—was signed; and the Court knew it.

There was drawn up within the Tuileries, under the eye of the Queen, by the hand of Barnave,[2] a document which could not but precipitate the quarrel. It originated the insolent series of domestic interference whose climax was to be the manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick, and whose intolerable pretensions roused the French to their ultimate successes. It travelled round by way of Brussels to Vienna, and was received again in Paris through the Austrian ambassador as though it had been the spontaneous expression of the Emperor. On the 1st of March it was read to the Assembly; the Parliament heard with indignation that Leopold saw fit to condemn the Jacobins as a "pernicious sect," and the capital was admitted to the private mind of foreigners upon its internal economy. While they were yet preserving an indignant silence to hear this Macedonian playing the steward in Greece, destiny had gone before intrigue, and Leopold was dead.

In ten days Brissot had opposed to the haste and bigotry of Leopold's son a new and consolidated power. For it was upon the 10th of March that he attacked, with the details and references of a prosecution, the King's foreign minister, Delessart. He was followed by the chief voice of his party, Vergniaud.

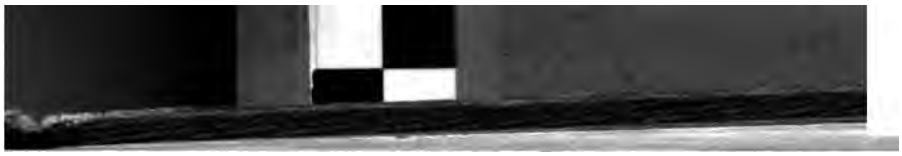
Vergniaud's power ordinarily resided in a vibration of tone and a grave balance of words, but that day he recalled Mirabeau, and with the same gesture of

[1] This ecclesiastic was a young man, genial, a glutton, and enormously fat. The door of his carriage was made of a special size to fit him.

[2] Madame de Staël, iii. 270. She had a better chance of knowing than any one.

menace that the dead man had thrown out in the Constituante, he branded the moment with a phrase. Beyond the windows of the Manège the palace was moving with men—they reached six thousand before the close of the struggle, and Murat was their type —a sword. Vergniaud called up mere words whose strength lay in their appeal to a populace that was half in arms. . . . "Terror and a secret fear have come out often enough upon us from your doors! to-day let them enter in. . . ." The Court yielded. Delessart abandoned his office; the fatuous Narbonne, whatever he may have meant to do, was relieved of power. By the Thursday of the next week the King had sent for a man already in his middle age, but whose dark hair, touched here and there with steel, whose vigorous, great eyebrows, rapid glance, and forward gesture of the arms betrayed Provence and the cavalry. It was Dumouriez.

The struggle of the lower nobility had forged and twisted him; the Revolution released him as it released so many of his peers to an active career, but could not free him as it did the younger men from the tortuous vices of egotism and cabals, the nemesis of privilege in the State. He might have led his brigade at thirty-five, his corps at forty. His face still carried the sword-cuts of a fine defence, unhorsed in the hussars, when the decline of old France was running through the seven years' war. He had great knowledge of soldiers, more of men. The curse that attaches at once to aristocratic and to arbitrary societies combined in the old régime to force him into the bypaths of secret diplomacy. He had known the Bastille. Such subservience to fate had not soured his jolly temper nor dimmed his courage, but he had lost all conviction and had nothing left in him but ambition, a good heart, and a great irony. Out of this imperfection he became at last a traitor, but, alas! that such a man should have dragged out an old





age in exile, got daubed with the bribes of Pitt, or have tried to rest in death out of his own soil between the hills and in the silence of the Thames.

This man, not without patriotism and accepting the Revolution as a thing achieved, but bent especially upon personal success, reinforced the democracy at a charge. Upon the 19th of March,[1] after but four days of hesitation he appeared at the Jacobins.

The last few weeks had produced a symbolism that invariably accompanies political exaltation and whose methods savour to less active times of the grotesque or the insane. Dumouriez, most eager to accept in full a movement which he had never comprehended, fell to what must have been to him the most ridiculous of humiliations and stood up in the tribune with the red cap upon his head. The gulf that lay between Robespierre's single idea with its permanence and directness and the mixture of political intrigues that surrounded the Gironde was very apparent in what followed; for when Dumouriez had raised his hand as though to swear a new allegiance to the nation in its extreme necessity, and had met with the great wave of applause upon which he had calculated when he planned the stroke, Robespierre, precise and austere, took his place in the tribune. With the usual play of spectacles, fumbling and manuscript, in the usual weakness of tone and amid the usual enwrapping silence he read out his usual complaint.

"He was delighted to see a minister at the Jacobins: he only hoped that the war—if it had to come—would be prosecuted as sincerely as they had heard promised. He was sorry to see that a member who had opposed the printing of Dumouriez' speech had been hissed. No one should be hissed in a free assembly. If Dumouriez was really a friend and protector of the popular movement, the Jacobins would support him . . ." and so forth.

[1] And not the 16th, as he says in his "Memoirs."

The whole was a web of generalities and platitudes, the underlying text that never appeared on the surface was a permanent suspicion of all the parliamentarians, Court, new ministers, salons, Brissots, generals and Feuillants lumped into one incongruous body in the speaker's mind. But it was not the speech itself that was the most characteristic part of his attitude, it was rather a little incident that marked his entry into the tribune. As he went up the steps some friend or other clapped the red cap upon his carefully powdered hair. Robespierre had, for once, a flash of anger: all it meant was hateful to him, disorder, delirium, the mania for war, the loss—as he feared—of his own leadership and of the method and creed which he worshipped far more than success. He flung the cap on the ground and left it there, and so opened his speech with restrained passion.

A month passed between that night and the declaration of war. With every session of the Jacobins and with every act of the ministry during that time his peculiar isolation was emphasised. He went on his way preaching his eternal doctrine and in every speech and pamphlet reasserting one or all of his half-dozen dogmas. Also he thought that he had lost, but the Revolution was to show very soon the immense force of that persistence; the defeats were to lift him, the disillusion of the Girondins under the stress of a shameful campaign was to enhance the reputation of their opponent and to recall his prophecies of evil; within six months he was to be elected for the city with a kind of unanimity. But in these last days of March he could not get his speeches printed, sometimes they were hardly heard.

On the 26th, in a famous speech upon nothing in particular, he had preached a personal God, and the phrase, "Providence, that arranges our destinies far better for us than we do for ourselves," had brought the passionate Guadet to his feet. He was full of

those things which found Robespierre intolerable: the encyclopædia, common sense and the vivacity of the most cultured society in France.

"I have heard the name 'Providence' continually throughout this speech; and it seems to me I heard it said that Providence kept on saving the Revolution in spite of itself. I cannot understand a man like Robespierre countenancing superstition at this moment."

Robespierre improvised a reply, not without eloquence, but on the proposal to print this sermon and send it round to the affiliated societies, there was such a hubbub that no decision could be taken.

On the 30th it was still worse. The renewed proposal to print provoked a renewed disturbance, and when the Bishop of Paris, from the chair, explained the drift of the speech and its religious value, Santhonax, near the door found the moment opportune to cry "No Monkishness," and the meeting ended in a huge noise.

He did indeed guide the club still when his opinion was at one with the general feeling. When the soldiers of the Revolt at Nancy were liberated from their galleys and feasted in Paris as a symbol of the triumph of the Revolution, his protests against a delay in their reception were successful. His attack on Lafayette (put forth as was ever his habit, in that impersonal manner, "There is a general," &c., . . . ) was applauded and accepted. But as a leader throughout these last weeks of the peace, he stood more and more alone. He could not claim to control the club. The tradition that had clothed him and that had made even a memory of the Constituante greater than the actual presence of the Legislative seemed failing in the flood of new names, in the high success of Vergniaud and his comrades, in the power of a Girondin ministry about to lead the novel temper of the people into a popular war.

For Brissot ever at work to knit his schemes had

brought Dumouriez at evening to the Rolands, had made the old Stoic Minister of the Interior, and had found in that minister's young wife the soul of the new cabinet. For close upon a month a purely Girondin ministry had directed the vigorous policy of the nation, had summoned Austria to frank terms and had prepared—as it thought—the appeal to arms. Under such an influence one force after another melted from Robespierre, leaving him in his tenacity for peace, in his disdain for glory almost solitary. What saved him? A personal popularity which all this change could not affect, the habit of thousands of silent, obscure democrats who knew nothing of the salons and for whom the Gironde had yet to be tested by success in the campaign, the fixity of his principles that formed the landmark of the drifting crowd—all these things attached to him. They were dormant for the moment in the cry for defence and armies; they were by no means paralysed, and Robespierre was wrong (as he ever was in his appreciation of men) when he now thought himself deserted. He abandoned the post of public prosecutor to which he had been elected. His brooding doubt and his bitterness at a future of loneliness and failure reached their climax with the advent of war.

On the 19th of April Dumouriez read in the Parliament the terms upon which Austria would consent to peace. The Princes of Alsace were to receive back all their feudal rights; there were to be serfs again in France nor was any form of compensation to be tolerated. To the Pope, Avignon was to be restored; to the French Crown, every lost function whereby it could "repress that which might cause anxiety to neighbouring states." Therefore on the morrow, in the crowded and silent hall of the Manège, Dumouriez triumphed and the King of France peering short-sightedly at his notes, read in a very ordinary voice his declaration

of war against the King of Hungary and Bohemia. The world was never again the same.

Hitherto I have followed through this chapter the fortunes and opinions of a man whom Nature had not intended to be great, and to whom the accident of the Revolution had as yet given nothing but a steadfast, brilliant, and fictitious popularity. I have shut out the general picture by standing within his closed mind, for it has been my task not to present the immense travail of that new world, but to consider one only of those whom it affected, one in whom it did not see itself reflected, and whom it in no way inspired with its profound energy.

But here, as I have written the word War, the insignificance of such a theme appals me, and I see that not even the truth about this one individual can be made plain unless some glimpse of that portentous background is admitted to the scene. For to write of Robespierre's suggestive monotone, and in so writing to stumble upon that great debate into which there entered, and still enter, all the powers of the world; which forms our modern legend, and from which we nations derive our blood and pride, as families once did theirs from the Carlovingian memory, is like sitting up in a darkened room throughout the night upon some exact calculation, and at last to look up by chance and see through the shutters that it is dawn. Then one abandons for a moment the ceaseless labour of mechanical details, and throws open the windows to the air and the day. Beneath the house a falling lawn discovers all the country-side, and the eye rests upon life everywhere growing and awakening: this infinity is framed rather than bounded by the amplitude of the horizon.

I turn, then, from the consideration of the enigma whose solution is the matter of this book, to recall the magnitude and complexity of the new forces that created the Republic.

From the death of Mirabeau, through the flight of the King on to the massacre of the Champ de Mars and the Declaration of Pilnitz, the ancient forms of French life, though upon the eve of extinction, were yet maintained; by which I do not mean that the titles of the noblesse, or even the "de," were heard, nor that lethargy still possessed the mass of the nation, but that the indifference of the upper classes to religion, combined with a concern for its establishment, the ineradicable habit of monarchy (where monarchy had been real), the sullen hesitation of the peasants, and the natural division between foreign and domestic affairs were the limits that bounded the mind of France.

There was, however, latent, and as yet but potential, beneath the ruined shell of society a spirit which in art, arms, and politics drew from the very centres of life. It was a thing not meant for daylight; it was the energy which all sane institutions work to control, and to which tradition gives laws and limitations; for it is as destructive as the elemental fire, and no one can look on it and live. This primal spirit breaks down all the varied inconsequence of matter, it attempts to create from the beginning like a god, and, like a god wrestling with matter, it accomplishes imperfectly and with infinite pains and terrors its task of forcing a mind into the dead chaos of things. This spirit, which no one has yet named, though its spark lies at the base of all existence, sometimes pierces dangerously through for a moment to purge the world. It was so with Islam, and it was so with the revolutionary wars. The accident that lifted from it its immemorial blindness was the friction of '92. For there is set to the mind of man a boundary of endurance which may be compared to that degree of heat at which the atoms of a substance change their relation to each other, and produce new forms through violence. If that boundary be passed, the common stuff of the mind takes on a form in which

exist all heroisms, and the lyric and madness also.) The threat to internal liberty, the dread of a vast disappointment, the incubation of the quarrel between the citizen and the religion of the citizen, the buying of the Church lands, the maturity of reaction—all these irritants received an intolerable accession from the menace of foreign interference, and from the discovery in the dull mass of the new Parliament of that Force of the Word which was called the Gironde. By patriotism and by anger the whole nation received as a mission what had been but a civic concern. Men began to take the things of waking as we do those of dreams; there was in all they did a colour of vision; its extravagance, its mixture of incongruous things, its awful spell, driving the mind; its power to achieve. From this proceed the large cadences of Vergniaud, the frenzy or prophecy of Isnard, the folly of red caps and pikes—but there is one example that sums up all: Rouget de Lisle, a mile from the Rhine, in the last hours of peace coming into that crowded dinner and singing with the daughters of Dietrich his new song; for the Marseillaise with its platitudes and its immortal phrases set to such a kind of tune is the whole of '92.

What followed all the world knows. How every question was asked and answered in two years, and how the force for such a work proceeded from the open furnace of the Terror. I must return to the story. The purpose of the digression with which I have delayed it is to show that Robespierre—since it is upon that slight and constant figure that I must remain—stands out henceforward a black outline against a conflagration. Not he, but some fantastic shadow of him, is cast outward from the flame and broadens; as the fire first exaggerated, so the fury of its highest glow transfigured, and at last its fall consumed him.

The first months of the war are an embroglio whose

complex elements must be separately seized if one is to understand the various angers that united to discover a simple and violent solution in the insurrection of the 10th of August. In these eddies Robespierre appears now from one aspect, now from another—not because their movement caught him but, on the contrary, because he stood fixed and apart, now seeming a butt, now remembered as a true prophet, now half a leader, and at last overwhelmed and hidden by the rush of action. The physical battle over, he reappeared with all his popularity intact.

The factors of the situation were these. The King was powerful: it is the neglect of that elementary truth which vitiates half the French and nearly all the foreign histories of the period. He had suffered what was for royalty insult, especially from the Parliament, and since we know that he was to fall, the inevitable error whereby historians read their own acquaintance with the future into the minds of contemporaries makes us exaggerate his difficulties in the spring of 1792. He could and did exercise his veto, and that when the public opinion most resented it. The whole administrative system and the whole hierarchy of the regular army centred in his hands, and that centralisation was far from being a fiction in a country which had grown increasingly familiar with bureaucracy for six generations. No disposition of troops could be made, no general orders could be issued without his acquiescence, nor, commonly, apart from his initiative, and he possessed under his immediate orders and with a security in their discipline and devotion, the only regular troops and the only men who had seen service in the capital: in number close upon four thousand men, whom the royalists of the militia could readily bring up to a full six.

Dependent upon this power of the King and trusting in its maintenance were these two forces: the

general officers in active command—especially Lafayette: Dumouriez at the Foreign Office, a man whose energy and initiative were the only true forces in the whole ministry.

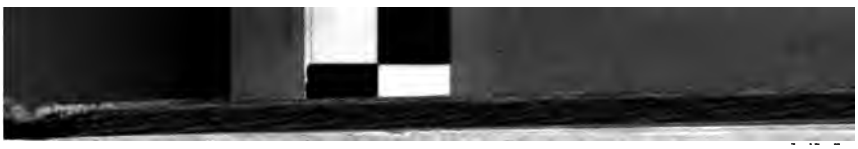
Lafayette was a soldier, he knew the rottenness of the old army and the softness of the new; he had a detestation and, at that moment, a legitimate dread of anarchy; his abstract principles were all for a constitutional monarchy, his personal emotions (which are in such men far more powerful than any theories) had turned to a fine loyalty and human affection for the royal family; nor is it unjust to add that a certain bitterness at the way his popularity had melted and the Revolution escaped him coloured, though it did not direct, his attitude in this crisis. By one of those complications that differentiate history from constructed fiction, the Queen, who was the soul of the Court and whom he was chiefly bent on saving, detested him, and would rather have been saved by a plaster Narbonne or the living devil of the Jacobins

In Dumouriez two elements met: the dominant factor was personal ambition—for it to be said that he had made and led the great war of the Revolution, and been the master of its success; the secondary factor was a regard for the society he had known with its salons, its king and its diplomacy, as the only thing possible in France. For such a man the spirit '93 was to seem an incomprehensible welter, the first rising of it in the insurrection of '92 a muddling catastrophe. Both these men then depended in different ways, for their repelling of the invaders, on the power of the King, while the King and his Court desired nothing so much as the success of the foreign armies and their rapid arrival before the capital. So much for the Tuileries.

In opposition to the palace, the Assembly over whom Brissot's lobbying and the young oratory of the Gironde had now an absolute mastery desired merely an en-

thusiastic crusade: a cavalry charge. From the ranks of their supporters, from the salon of Madame Roland and the coterie of the *Patriote Français*, the ministry had been drawn. But they could not forget that though it was the "Girondin ministry" its head and by far its most powerful man was Dumouriez whom indeed they supported right on into the Republic, but whom they knew well to have little in common with that clear enthusiastic religion of theirs that put for the goal of its armies the vision of a free world. These Stoics felt upon their flank a force that hampered and exasperated them as they bent their energies against the Court; that force was the popularity of men outside their society and their philosophy, the unreason of the populace, the over-reason of the mob's preachers, the violence of Paris and especially that instinctive, inarticulate determination to keep the nation one and disciplined—a determination odious to their creed of local autonomy. Because this determination was most evident in the great system which the thousand societies of Jacobins had thrown over France and which they directed from the Rue St. Honoré, and because that coldness and over-reason of the popular critics (with its opposition to the war and its everlasting suspicion of parliamentary methods) was personified in Robespierre, therefore they marked out the nucleus of the Jacobins (of which club they were all members and whose majority they still affected) as an enemy, and especially they besieged the person of Robespierre. Such were the Girondins, and to them a successful war was a necessity—and a thing taken for granted.

To the third party in this triangular struggle a special attention is required, for it is the heir of the future of the Revolution and the habitat of my subject. The town of Paris, eager, querulous, direct, and boiling with ill-ordered passions; national but full of a local pride, extreme in democracy, careless of death, deter-





mined to be the gaoler or the executioner of treason, has through fifteen hundred years slowly realised the French people. There was not as yet, in the early summer of 1792, an expressed or conscious Parisian will to be master of the Parliament or to inform the whole State, but the city was clearly a magnet to the revolutionary genius of the provinces and the centre of its expression in speech and writing. Already its idol had been made a god of in the Artois, soon its mandatories were to be the merciful tyrants of Lyons or the butchers of Nantes. Of this Paris the club of the Cordeliers with Danton for its leader were already the arms and the lungs; that hard minority of the Jacobins that gave the club all its spirit, was the brain; and the name continually on the lips of the street was that of the voice of the Jacobin theory, the interminable and inflexible monotony, Robespierre. He stood like a ritual, a perpetual solace of repetition to those who believed. Thus, while the natural division would seem to lie between the Court and the two liberal parties of Girondin and Jacobin, to these last the Girondins were confounded with the Court, and beyond the gulf stood Robespierre and his pure faith denouncing intrigue.

It is not wonderful then that, as the opening of a campaign is marked by an immediate assault on the first lines of defence to clear the road, so the Girondins, in the necessity of preparing public opinion for the struggle, made a charge upon the position of Robespierre, who had opposed the war, and would still oppose a crusade. Within a week after the declaration of hostilities, on Wednesday, the 25th of April, the attack upon Robespierre was made and failed.

It was able and thorough; all the voting power that Brissot could still command mustered in the club. He himself, for a full two hours, broke down, so far as argument could, the imaginary denuncia-

tions of his enemy. His common sense, his knowledge of books and languages, his travels were his allies. He assailed Robespierre's mere leadership of opinion: "What have you *done?* What are you in the Revolution?" Robespierre's perpetual fear of arms and of dictators he justly ridiculed, and in a passage that should be, but is not, famous, he exposed, as was done but rarely in that time, the absurdity of current historical parallels. Robespierre had thought Lafayette a Cromwell, a pink and white Cromwell with a weak nose.

"Those who see a Cromwell in Lafayette," said Brissot, "know neither their country, nor the time they live in, nor Cromwell, nor Lafayette. It needs a certain force of character to become a Lord Protector. . . ."

He attacked the whole Robespierrean scheme of suspicion, the underground intrigues, the supposed alliance between the Court and himself, Brissot. He did it with evidence, documents, and personal asseveration. He demanded some shadow of proof for these ceaseless accusations. All right reason was on his side, and yet history has justified Robespierre's intuition upon the main point. The Court was betraying, and all those who maintained its generals were unconsciously (he thought consciously) leading the nation to disaster.

Throughout Brissot's long speech cries and interruptions had disturbed him. In its first part, Desmoulins had called out "Scoundrel" very loud and frequently; in its second the public galleries interfered. At its close, Robespierre went straight to the steps of the tribune. He was not in the list of speakers; he claimed a point of order. Guadet, who was down to speak, supplanted him, and in a speech far more passionate and far less reasoned than Brissot's, yet touched a quicker nerve; for he spoke of "the love of the people" and of the danger of idols. He proposed that Robespierre

should withdraw from public life. He was a cause of dissension in the club and in the city, and his ceaseless denunciations disturbed the machinery of the democratic advance.

That such a speech should exasperate the public galleries was natural, it was more significant of the times that the club itself joined in the tumult. Hats in the air and cries disturbed Guadet and inflamed him, Robespierre with the Puritan in him at an icy boiling point begged his friends to be silent.

"All men have a right to a public hearing. Moreover, these cries prevent me catching the accusations made against me. I shall take all interruptions as the acts of men who wish me ill." He stood up in his place to say this, and turned to the galleries.

They gave him his silence, and when Guadet, who felt that Brissot and he had lost, came down from the tribune, Robespierre, in one of those rare improvisations that revealed him, used, in addition to his perpetual habit of hard moderation in tone the weapon of irony that he had played with in his youth, but that the sincerity and preaching of his public career had forgotten.

"Do you not see," he began, leaning humbly towards his enemies and speaking constrainedly and coldly, "that if I were to retire it would argue vanity? Why then I should be posing and I should seem a great man, whereas M. Brissot alone has the right to establish men by categories. Nor do I see the effect my retirement would have since I have no places in my gift, and no talent for parliamentary combinations."

It was eleven, and the club hated late hours; they cheered him and streamed out, leaving one, Simond, to hold forth till close on midnight to sleepy votaries. On the next day but one, the Friday, his victory was complete. With Danton in the chair, they voted the printing of his defence, sent it to the affiliated societies, and

left on record their condemnation of Brissot and Guadet.

To that domestic check fate was about to add a blow far more decisive, a blow that silenced party for a moment, and, while it further undermined Gironde, raised Robespierre in the estimation even of close observers, yet united all the national parties against the Court. For it was on the next day, Saturday, the 28th, that Theobald Dillon's fifteen hundred met the first fire of the war and were struck with panic; in the disorderly flight of these recruits their general was massacred.

Whether, as Dumouriez hints, the ambuscade was the direct result of Court treason, or whether (as was more likely from the character of the Irishman that led them) an over-confidence in such troops had produced the disaster, it is certain that the army as a whole was quite unfitted for war. Enthusiasm distorts. The burning levies had no conception of that hard truth by which military strength lies more than half in military habit and unreasoning obedience. Peasants snatched into the ranks displayed the pitiful simplicity that has added a note of farce to these tragedies—those Picards of Quiévrain, for instance, who being for the first time under fire leapt from their ditch, waved their hats and shrieked in their patois, "For God's sake, gentlemen, take care; there are people here where you are shooting." Everywhere, also, politics had disturbed the armies, and insufficient equipment, detachments of insufficient strength (for political generals have two fronts to think of and keep their armies together, while bad discipline is afraid of large separate posts) ruined such general plans as Dumouriez may have issued to the forces. One force pushed up the gorge of the Ardennes to Givet, which is the salient angle of the French against the Netherlands. There it stood still, unable to gather more than 10,000 men. The foreign mercenaries obeyed their officers and boldly

deserted in formation—as the Royal Allemand. Elsewhere the officers went over to the *émigrés*, their French soldiers refusing to follow. As at Bercheny where they carried off the colours, which a certain sergeant observing, he was so angry that he galloped after his deserting superiors and boldly wrested away the standard from a young ensign that was trotting at the tail. With these he returned to the loyal camp, and his regiment still preserves them. Worst of all, the army of the centre that might at any moment have marched to reinforce the north stood still, partly because the men were of poor training, partly because their plan had been to hold all the frontier from the Vosges to the Ardennes, but mainly because Lafayette who commanded them had his face turned towards Paris, and was determined not so much upon the campaign as upon saving the King.

The news of all this breakdown came upon the city in May. Upon the first of the month came the rumour of Dillon's disaster and death. Next day the defeat of Biron. Then the Austrian occupation of Guienne. At that moment, had the armies of the eighteenth century been in the habit of silent preparation and had the allies preserved a larger and mobile force on the north-east, nothing could have saved the Revolution. The Court took on a different air, there was a brilliance and gaiety in it that recalled Versailles. That large neutral and inarticulate minority of opinion in Paris, a minority that still lay in the rut of habit and desired repose, was willing to support the Crown; it hoped in some vague way that the failure of this Girondin war would bring them back strong government and security without a national humiliation. Reactionary groups partly controlled the streets.

The Assembly and the Girondin ministry that still hung on to power and had not yet openly quarrelled with their master, Dumouriez, were vigorous in decrees. The exile or transportation of the non-juring priests was

passed: it was ordered that the King should dismiss that great guard, part of which the law allowed him, part of which he had gathered in spite of it; finally, with the new month, on the 8th of June the Parliament called upon the provincial cantons (that sent delegates to the annual Federation a month later) to furnish each five men in arms, and these they proposed to establish and train in a great camp of 20,000 men under Paris; some said to furnish the frontier, some to watch the King.

The King consented to dismiss his guard. Indeed the measure was purely verbal. The Guard ceased to exist as a corporate body, but its members were lodged near the palace in private houses, while the nucleus of trained mercenaries, the Swiss, were sent into barracks a short march from Paris, at Rueil, not ten miles along the best of roads.

Upon the edict against the insurrectionary priests, however, and upon the formation of the camp of 20,000 he put an uncompromising veto, and would not be shaken, so strong was the Court at this moment. On the 13th, Dumouriez having taken sides with the King, poor old Roland was driven to protest against him, with the result that the Girondin ministry found itself suddenly dismissed, and Dumouriez, who had thought to be the master of the moment by his defection—who had, indeed, been named minister of war—discovered the Court to be more subtle and stronger than he was; within two days he had fallen from power and gone off to command the disorganised forces in the north.

There followed one of those great scenes of the Revolution, the vastness of whose moving crowds and the sense of whose force and tide has formed a principal picture for historians. The mobs of the east of the city, of St. Marceau and of St. Antoine, grumbled for seven days, fell under their accustomed leaders, and, with some vague object of menacing or witnessing the

King, with a memory also that it was the anniversary of the Tennis Court, they made the 20th of June. They poured before the startled Assembly, occupied the palace with a noisy and terrifying good-humour, saw Louis wear the red cap, and melted back into the unorganised impotence of numbers. They had rehearsed an insurrection and had done nothing; for no one was quite sure of what the Court might intend.

In the Jacobins the climax of the dismissal of the ministry and the final isolation of the Court had somewhat calmed the ceaseless quarrel between the Girondins and Robespierre. The lull that followed the first disasters of the war left him far more secure than he had been even after his victory against Guadet and Brissot. He had proved to be the great adviser, the seer. The rôle suited him too well to be abandoned for revenge or triumph; he continued to advise on his unwavering line—it did not affect him that this line coincided for the moment with what the anger and disappointment of the Girondins desired.

Upon one matter indeed he stood somewhat apart, rather in silence than in the expression of his undoubted contempt; I mean upon the insurrection of the 20th of June. To the Girondins, with whom the revolutionary anger was a kind of goddess, this insurrection seemed a good thing, a reply at once to the Court and to the pedants, a proof of the new vigour with which the people meant by force of arms to defend the full reform, but to Robespierre it was doubly odious: as anarchy and as a handle for the Court. Also, later, he made it an accusation against Pétion that the Mayor of Paris had believed himself the author of the insurrection. For the rest, Robespierre concentrated now, as the Girondins did, against Lafayette.

Lafayette had sent an open letter to Paris—a letter that had half made the Revolt in protest. A week after

that day he appeared at the bar of the Assembly and had the inconceivable folly to counsel and patronise the French, advising them to a national resistance when their great blame of him lay in his inattention to that national resistance. He talked like the Austrian, dragging in the "Jacobin Faction" and echoing Leopold's letter of the winter. In this he ruined himself and his vague constitutional-loyalist-aristocrat-middle-class cause. The Court was far too strong to need him, the Revolution suspected him, the Jacobins determined to destroy him. A farcical review on the terrace of a hundred men who were to save the State, then next day of a ragged thirty, a return to his command, an attempt at civil war, finally an interrupted flight after the 10th of August and the fall of the throne, ended in Austrian prisons the revolutionary career of the most patriotic, liberal, vain, sincere, and courageous noodle that ever boasted quarterings or gloried in constitutions and top-boots.

Robespierre's two attacks upon that general took the form of huge literary compositions, the second of some merit, and containing at least this phrase: "You intrigue and intrigue and intrigue. You are of the calibre of a palace revolution. It is beyond your strength to interrupt the revolution of a world."

This speech marks the last moment in which he can be watched or can count as an influence upon the fall of the monarchy. To repeat a phrase I have already used in this chapter, action overwhelmed him, and he disappeared submerged. The receding flood found him, in that totally new world which the 10th of August made, still standing, more than ever an idol, repeating the same ritual, and destined to be the first elected deputy of the capital.

The 10th of August was Danton, and I give the story of it in another place. It was a supreme action, and Robespierre was so much the negation of action that

the presentation of that battle is utterly incongruous to an analysis of his career. He did not fly or hide or withdraw, but he escaped its influence altogether, and the one thing we know of him in the clear and dreadful night that Lucille Desmoulins suffered and described and that her husband and his friends filled with arms, is that he sat at home in the noise of the tocsin, very impassive in face of Barbaroux, or any other violent man; and then next day, not six hours after the final victory of the people, made a good literary speech at the Jacobins, in which he very calmly advised the new powers to do all those vigorous new things upon which they had already determined.

But I would not leave that prodigious event from which proceed the power and confidence of European democracy and whose success was also that of our new anxious world without noticing two things. First, the date on which the King may first be counted as definitely in arms against the capital; secondly, the appearance that the disturbance took on for a casual and accurate contemporary, whose curious and almost unknown account happens to have survived.

The decisive moment is surely the 11th of July, a month before the insurrection. Vergniaud's speech of the 3rd had summed up the case against the King. Lamourette's empty concord of the 7th had but emphasised its own vanity, for that same day the King's friends, the Department of Paris, had dismissed the mayor, Pétion, saying that he had made the insurrection of the 20th of June. But it was on the 11th that the Parliament issued its public appeal to the nation, and declared the "Peril of the Commonwealth," and it is from this day that Louis weakens politically, strengthens himself militarily. On the 12th his confirmation of Pétion's dismissal begins the universal exasperation. On the 13th he submits to the decree of the Assembly rein-

stating Pétion. It was his first great check. The 14th he hears the violent sadness of the Federation, and if it be urged that it was principally the insolent Declaration of Brunswick that launched the Revolt (which is true), and that the arrival of the Marseillais and their guns made it possible, it is still more noteworthy that on the 23rd, two days before Brunswick signed his mad draft, and five before it was known in Paris, the Federations running up from every part of France had all demanded the deposal of the King.

It is certainly at this moment that France moves. The King had been the King; now he begins to be a fortress for the invader held from within. Though no one dared call for the name of a Republic, the thing sprang out alive. "Not only the towns but the peasants," or (as we should put it in England), "not only the middle classes but the slums," understood the danger which the parliament in the teeth of the Court had declared to be public and imminent. A little too late for her immediate purpose, early enough for honour, and sufficiently, in the end, to conquer Europe, France at last really armed. It was not only that the volunteers flocked in, it was also that most men then began to stand ready in their mind for death. An infinite reserve for resistance was created by the soul of France.

As for the second point, the effect and description of the day of the Revolt, it is drawn from the letter which a genial bourgeois kind of a fellow, one Azéma,[1] Member for the Aude, sent to his constituents, taking for his text that admirable, admirable proverb of the Languedoc, *Mal usa ne pot dura.*

It was two in the morning, yet the anxious Assembly was still in session under the thousand candles in the vast oval of the Manège. Azéma wearied and walked out

[1] The letter is unpublished, but may be found quoted in the *Révolution Française* for August 1894.

into the night. The long roll of drums by which the French introduce action, "the générale," began to sound far off from the guard-rooms of the section, and the tocsin swung in all the belfries, but the streets were empty, and the noise echoed up into a clear air with stars. So many were watching on that night that all the windows seemed lit as with an illumination, and under the oppression of this unnatural loneliness and of all those eyes expecting morning, he came back again to his seat in the hall.

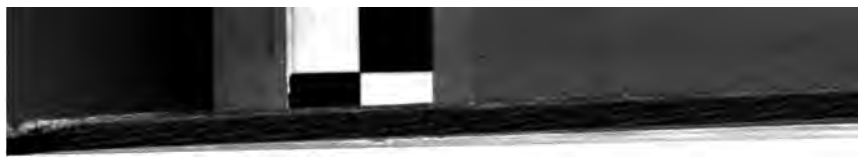
At six o'clock the Assembly suspended its sitting, and he went out northward by the Feuillant Door. Up the street, in what is now the Place Vendome, he saw guns massed; erect and silent gunners. He turned back, past the palace—there was no one in the square. Within, the royal garrison was at review. He reached the river and walked on eastward to the Hôtel de Ville, where the insurrectionary Commune sat poising its blow. The Place de Grève was empty. Then back again westward by the Halles, and everywhere he passed through lonely streets to the noise of the bells. As it neared seven o'clock small groups began to pass him, women among them. He drew near the wall to let a batch from Marseilles go by singing; they were dragging a couple of guns. By the time he reached the Feuillant Door again he saw a great mob gathered about it; there was no entering. He went round westward to try the Capuchin Gate, and as he was struggling thither, the noise of the volleys came from the palace; the mob roared and streamed back outward to the Tuileries. At last he entered the hall of the Parliament, and saw there, behind the grating of the reporters' box, the King and Queen and their children; then he knew that the game was won.

About him, two hundred of the seats were empty. The Assembly sat silent for a while, and outside the monotony of the loud battle was broken at last by the

louder clamour of the charge, and the palace admitted its great torrent of men. Twenty deputies, of whom he was one, were sent out to parley with the crowd; they were swept by its pressure back and inwards from the Carrousel. They re-entered the Parliament and every one looked at his neighbour, listening to the guns. Then as the cannon passed up beneath their windows a threat or a savage exultation from without came in with the growing heat of the morning; fear dropped from them, the conquest, the dangers, the enemy marching on the city, the Republic born, ran through them with the August sunlight, and in one of those sudden actions that made the three Parliaments of Revolution like soldiers, they started up together and cried out repeatedly the name of the nation. Then the nation took the throne, the orb, and the lilies, and in the lodge behind the screen that veiled him, the face of the last king was blotted out.

When it was evening Azéma went out in the dark among the bearers and their lanterns and tried to count those that still lay dead in the courtyard and the gardens. There were lost in that short time and in that little space, more men than have[1] fallen in battle throughout this African war.

[1] Written in March 1901. In this I follow Aulard, who has read everything there is to read, and quotes 5000. Azéma, who saw only what remained after a whole day's work with the stretchers, gives a much lower figure.



# CHAPTER VI

## ROBESPIERRE AND PARIS

In the presence of such a recasting as that of the 10th of August a man is tempted to write not a chapter but a book. The time itself, grown used to a fundamental transformation, yet spoke of this new upheaval in whispers, calling it "Revolution." Open any memoir at random, read any speech of the succeeding autumn, and you will find this one thought running through them—a new basis of equilibrium had been discovered. *Mal usa ne pot dura:* the doubts and coverings of '91, the re-entrant agonies of early '92 had broken down as under a strain, and the real quarrel was ready to be threshed out—that is, the real truth had come up into the daylight. Shall I put it in one word? Terrible, perhaps, to our time and to the ears of moderns, but finally explicative of that catastrophe? The "upper class" had gone.

Hitherto the Revolution, working on a theory, metaphysical, preaching or postulating the dogma "equality," had had for its material those old divisions of society which not a century of persistent effort has appreciably weakened in Europe. Its leaders saw "the People" as worshippers see their God; and they made an image of "the People" after their own image. One group was for excluding (and succeeded in excluding) the proletariat from the vote; another claimed a full suffrage for "the People." In the chapel of the Jacobins night after night a vision of "the People" filled the darkness of the nave above the candles, haunted the remote and deserted chancel.

It inflamed a hundred orators, and inspired the noblest rhetoric of that tribune. But "the People" were not there; doctors, lawyers, contractors, master carpenters, master masons, many young lords, and a few old livers[1] made up the audience to which could be thrown such golden enthusiasms. *Peuple ce jour te fera eternel.*

The "People" had been a factor spoken of, admitted to exist—the First Clause of a Creed—but what it *was* they did not know any of them till, on the 10th of August, the People appeared. Then the democrats were tested by fire, and it was seen which loved enough or believed enough to guide or serve or tolerate this great giant half awake and a child. For the People discovered what the leisure of the eighteenth century least expected in them, the epic song, ritual, the necessity for colours—even for the colour of blood.

The King—all save his person and the new legend surrounding it—had disappeared in that victory; but it was not only the King, very much more had disappeared. Consider why the Girondins had been able to establish their power in the year of the Legislative Assembly; why the Jacobins, their enemies, had hesitated throughout and been divided, and pretended that the Republic was a silly name; why the Assembly had seemed doubtful on the critical day of the battle. It was because until the 10th of August Society lay stratified; after the 10th of August the strata commingled. And the underlying

[1] Take any part of the list of members of the club at random; take the letter "A." Under "A" there are but twenty-seven names, and in these twenty-seven I find a famous chemist (Adet), later a diplomat. The lieutenant-general of Poitou (Agier), a duke (Aiguillon), a hotel-keeper (Agier), a large merchant (Allart), an ambassador (Alguier), a famous surgeon and his brother (the two Andrés), a well-known author and his brother (the Andrieux), a private gentleman of political ambitions (Anthoine), a marquis (Aoust), a provincial barrister (Armand), a large paper manufacturer (Arthur), the lieutenant-general of Aix and judge of the Court of Appeal (Audier), an officer (Aubriet), a wine merchant of Cognac (Augiet).

bulk, a thing hitherto spoken of in philosophic formula, feared as mobs, worshipped as a force, but neither touched and appreciated by the politicians, nor of itself organised for action—never a personality—now knocked at the gates, or rather entered as one living man enters and occupies his own place in arms. I shall show it later in the Municipal Council of '93.

This conquering force was the more irresistible from the fact that for years the upper class had preached its right to govern, that from '89 the rhetoricians had taken the People for their base, and that latterly it had been flattered, appealed to, used against the Crown. So the Girondins, so the philosophy of the eighteenth century was determined to resurrect the People, to bring the mass articulate again into the life of a great European nation; see how that sudden plunge back into the level of nature shook the world.

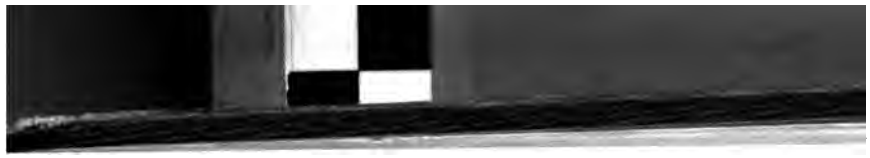
First there appeared what must always follow a sudden appeal to the popular voice: the reputations already made turned into watchwords and provoked enormous enthusiasms quite out of keeping with the value of the men they marked for honour. Secondly, and later, this too appeared: the primary instincts of the People, thrust into the petty debates of cultured men, produced divergencies and conflagrations. The gentry strained themselves to be worthy of the inner force that wells from below and supports societies in peril; they caught from the People the overwhelming influence of general passions that disturbs a horde, and they turned their debates into battles.

The second effect was an open breach between the Mountain and the Gironde. The cause of this was the exaltation of whatever names had, by the agencies of the clubs, fixed themselves on the popular ear—and among these there was no name like Robespierre's. He was himself ready to admit the title that the People, turbu-

lent, life-giving, offered to him who was uncreative, fixed in every convention of his frozen class.

This sudden change in the nature of his progress Robespierre accepted with an ease that would be astonishing did we not know how much of the politician entered into and made flexible the methods of his fixed mind. He went over bodily to Paris and the new incarnate populace; moved with them at their pace, and (what was more remarkable) consented to accept not a few of their inconsistencies; he was like a man afoot that finds his road end in a flooded river, and at once takes boat without inquiry, and welcomes the speed of the current. From the 10th of August till his election on the 5th of September, from that to the first session of the Convention, a fortnight later, he plunges deep into Paris.

Already before the 10th of August, there had been something like a determined plot to put him at the head of the movement; Barbaroux had seen and despised him; he had refused to make his room the headquarters of the Revolt. But now, afterwards, in spite of that refusal, Paris was determined upon Robespierre; and the medium of government into which Paris thrust him was the Commune. For the Commune of Paris had become the brain of the Revolution—the Commune was to turn later (when the Republic had been declared and the Convention launched), into its driving power. The men that had made the reform, the world that survived till early '92, had fallen, as it were, through a broken platform into an abyss. The discussions became futile. The Assembly could not govern. The Revolution was legal—it was even over-legal—but here was a fiction of legality which could not stand the common daylight. That these six hundred, who had but a few days since protected Lafayette, that hardly knew their own mind, that had never understood the disaster that threatened the Crown, should be left in control would have been something so counter





to the common sense of the moment that even in the remoter provinces it would have stood for anarchy and for France open to the invader. The dying Legislative had but one function to fulfil: to register the decrees of whatever was for the moment the necessary usurper, the dictator. That dictator and usurper was the Commune.

I know how monstrous this body appears to those who are unacquainted with the nature of France. I know that the voters who named it were called in haste, secretly, at night. I know that it sprang from a conspiracy, and outstepped all the boundaries which the Revolution had hitherto laid down for itself. I know that by arithmetic and paper arguments one can show, if one chooses, that it was irresponsible and arbitrary; a body of men that had captured the nation. But I say that a man who does not understand the hegemony of Paris, and who does not understand the rapid instinctive actions by which Paris determines each step in the development of the nation, is a man unfitted to deal with the history of France. He is like one who writes of England, not knowing that England has been, and still is, a country governed by one class; or like one that would analyse the conditions of Russia, not knowing how that sphinx lives by the interior life of an intense religion. No body in France could pretend to government at that moment save the City, and whether from a minority or no, it was yet from the articulate, determined, and representative part of Paris that the new, irregular Commune proceeded. The mass may not have voted—a great part were forbidden by law to vote, and for a great part the machinery of voting did not exist—but they were very willing to fight under the orders and to accept the voice of the new irregular Commune as though it were that of the people. It was the Commune that had attacked the palace, had organised the new militia, and had imposed its man, Danton, upon the ministry. The

Commune was therefore, in the month that lay between the fall of the Crown and the arrival of the Convention, the supreme power in France.

Now, observe how in the heat of this miracle Robespierre stood impassive, and how, his determination or ambition helping, it was yet the tradition formed of him that pushed him into power. Two days after the 10th of August—on Sunday, the 12th—he appeared at the session of the insurrectionary Commune. He was met with immediate and continued applause. Yet he had nothing to tell them save that they were "named by the people," which was not particularly true, and that "the wisdom of the people was watching over the safety of the country," whereas it was the very foil to wisdom, it was blind instinct that was doing it. At great length, utterly out of touch with the fever of the time, he developed his perpetual theme. The note had hardly changed since the time of buckled shoes and swords. Yet the Commune offered and offered itself to him. They sent him to be their spokesman before the Assembly. He accepted the task, and found himself presenting a petition that the old directory of the city should be discharged. In truth it was not a petition, it was an imperative command.

Robespierre, with his spectacles, his attitude of peering at the manuscript, read out a long defence of the new body, thoroughly argued upon legal grounds. He must have known that he was slipping from his absolutes: he was addressing a national parliament legally deputed and he was pleading for an irregular and illegal body that was in successful revolt. He excused himself to himself by this thought, that, but for the illegal Commune the absolute political justice he demanded could not have arrived.

This deputation entrusted to his leadership is the first of the many evidences, great and small, of the

place that was being thrust on him and of the way his contemporaries regarded him.

When the new Commune struck a medal in commemoration of the 10th of August they were careful to send it first of all as a gift or a homage to Robespierre: to him that had sat in his little bare room thinking of nothing but the pure right while the people were fighting. So men bring food for idols, but at least this food is eaten by the priests.

Around Robespierre at this moment there accumulated prints, medals, statuettes, congratulatory addresses, which he could do nothing but preserve and arrange, and which remained intact, a witness to the idolatry, when they were sold at auction to strangers after Thermidor.

And here is another evidence of his forward move.

The one thing that most decisively emphasised the power of the new Commune was that it, in theory a mere municipal body, undertook to form a tribunal to judge the treason of the Court. This usurpation of power is so illustrative of the power of the capital that all the extreme acts following the fall of the Crown,[1] all the establishment of democracy absolute seem unexpressive beside it. It pretended to a kind of royal dignity, to be a fountain of justice or of vengeance. Had the Assembly retained a pulse of vitality it would have resisted such an act of sovereignty. So far from resenting it the Assembly was willing to decree, but a week after the fall of the palace,[2] that a tribunal chosen by the city should be formed. It was even willing to allow the electors of Paris to name the members of that tribunal. It was willing to allow their meeting, voting,

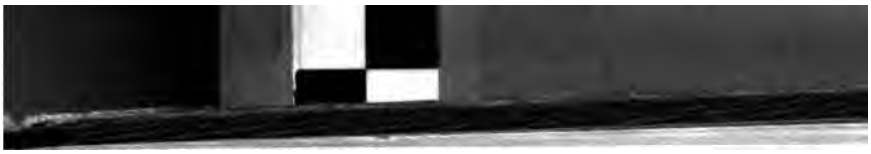
[1] There was declared the same day, by the Commune at least, Universal Suffrage, and the Assembly ratified the vote on the morrow. They assumed immediate jurisdiction over all the buildings and prisons of the capital, protecting the Louvre, sending their victims to La Force. They put their own officers at the gates.

[2] On August 17.

and establishing their right to judgment that very night in the great room of the town hall; and when Paris had achieved its usurpation and the ballot was taken as to who should preside at the future trial of the royalists that had defended the palace, the first name to appear was that of Robespierre; Robespierre who had not put himself forward as a candidate, who was unwilling to take a part so active and so responsible, and who resigned at once the dangerous office that had been pressed upon him.

On the same day it was Robespierre who was sent to the mayor of the old and broken municipality, to his old comrade, Pétion, to see whether some agreement could be come to between what had been the legal power in the town, and this new flaming insurrectionary thing. I will not believe that this moment determined the beginning of the quarrel between Pétion and Robespierre. That quarrel was part of the general strain between the Mountain and the Gironde; a necessary outcome of the divided temper which the Convention was to show. But it is typical of the way that Robespierre was pushed on upwards. He was an ensign before the advance of this new radical wedge that had come in to split France into the camps of '93, and to be driven by the hammer of the invasion permanently into the fabric of the country.

As this fortune fell upon him, and as he yielded to its opportunity, the last dust of the old order crumbled. Lafayette fled from his command and was condemned by the Parliament that in its old freedom had absolved him. The department of the Somme whose executive had refused to admit the legality of the decrees of this new revolutionary Parisian government was broken by the subservient Assembly and sent before the new high court which the Commune itself had formed. Within a fortnight of the storming of the palace it





was plainly evident that the Republic was born, and to Robespierre, I think, it was suggested that the perfect state lay in sight. This chance bound him to the city for ever, and the worship the city paid him thrust him on towards that function of ruler for which neither he nor others then knew his complete unfittedness.

The 26th of August is the date round which these origins cling, for at that date the extreme danger of France became openly apparent. On that Sunday it was known that Longwy on the rock that overlooks the frontier had surrendered. On that Sunday (Vendée was firing the first shots) the Assembly decreed that every priest that had within a fortnight neither taken the oath nor voluntarily fled the country should be transported to the colonies. On that Sunday they decreed that any discussion of capitulation by any citizen in the frontier towns should be punished with death. They withdrew all weapons from those who would not volunteer for the frontier; they authorised that vast inquisition of arms throughout the capital which led to the registering, the imprisonment, and the public noting of the minority that had plotted against the nation. Not knowing what lightning the air held, they prepared the massacres of September.

In the stroke of the invasion the Parliament seemed to remember for a moment that it needed no teaching, and was willing on its own account to borrow something of the energy of the times. Even Lamourette, a bishop and the author of the futile compromise of a few weeks before, found it possible to speak the language of the Revolution, deplored that some "had escaped from popular justice" on the 10th of August, spoke of the unhappy, bewildered, imprisoned Hapsburg woman as "one still atrocious to the nation"; called her what she would once have been had she dared, "the executioner of our country"; and in general showed what exaltation

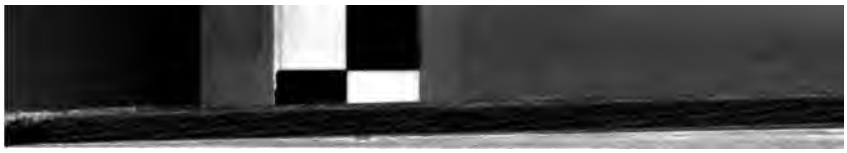
the mildest had caught in this new experience. He was a priest, and he was astonished and inflamed to find that God sometimes permits mere strength to threaten for a little while. A disciplined army, a thing that thought itself like steel, had passed the frontier and was on the straight road to Paris.

On that same 26th of August began the elections for the new Parliament that was so soon to meet and in these the fortune of Robespierre remains still rising and constant. Paris named its primaries, elected an electoral college of a thousand, sent up in that great crowd the mass of names that stand for '93. Robespierre's own section, the Place Vendome, which (since the last fortnight had transformed even language) was called the "Place des Piques," elected him unanimously to the college, and elected him president of the primary as well. He was ill,[1] partly unable to attend; his name was enough. Duplay was elected with him, and in the growing madness of that week Paris waited to hear the names of its members.

On the eve of the massacres of September, one hesitates a little where to place this self-observing, undiscovered mind. I have continually remarked throughout this book how removed he was from the creative passions that surrounded him; how their product, the greatest drama of the world, passed by him as a tide slips under a mist. It is true of the joys and the grandeurs; it is true also of September. When the irregular committee (which, to the eternal hurt of his country, Marat inspired) had determined upon the massacres—for I believe they were so determined[2]—when Manuel had

[1] He was so excused in the register of the Primary which Hamel saw before the war. I believe these records perished with so many others of the town archives in the destruction of the Hôtel de Ville in 1871.

[2] The arguments I find in favour of the exclusive responsibility of Marat and his committee will be found on pp. 183-84 of my "Danton," and in Appendix iv. pp. 340-46 of the same book.





announced to the Commune that Verdun was besieged; when on that same Sunday, the 2nd of September, the chance orderly came running into the hall where they were meeting, and told them that the prisons were invaded, and that a massacre had begun, Robespierre, nominally the leader, forced to be a leader by his contemporaries, might as well not have existed.

Michelet talks of his "diving down beneath the surface and disappearing" during those terrible three days. That sentence is the result of too imperfect a research. Robespierre did not even hide. He was there, he sat in the Commune, he did what little work he could in the general attempt to prevent the horrible vengeance; but as soon as there appeared a moment for action, all the inactive in his constitution plainly showed.

One single thing remains of what he did: he was one of three that were sent to the Temple to see that no attack should be made upon the royal family. Even that was hardly an action, for there was no question of an attack; the long band of tricolour tied all round the town wove a charm about it, and his journey was but a formal visit and return.

All through those terrible three days it was the law that the elections should proceed. They proceeded as if Paris were not assuming her chief responsibility before history, and as though one of the great crimes that hamper nations in their passage through time were not threatening to restrict throughout a century and more the action of liberty. On Monday, the second day of the massacres, the electoral college met in the archbishop's palace. The hall was restricted for those thousand men; they moved to the Jacobins. On the Wednesday when the last of violence was grumbling in the streets, they elected Robespierre, not with the unanimity that later saluted Danton, but by a strong majority, the first

deputy for Paris.[1] It was the only decision of the day.

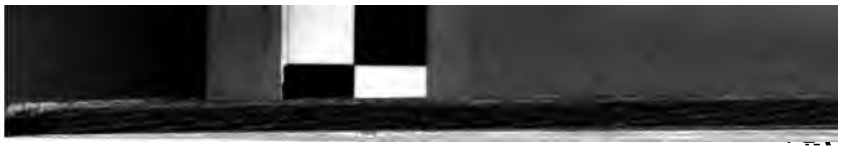
It was therefore in the atmosphere, and surrounded by the effect of September, that he entered his Republic, and yet it is as a man pure from any reproach of September that history must regard him. Even contemporary debate cleared him of a calumny so evidently incongruous to his character; the process of research has put it beyond any question—he was not only innocent of the blood; he was innocent even of comprehending that September had broken the ramparts of the new order, and had prepared the coalition of Europe. "See what comes to these people who dethrone kings? They become possessed with devils."

The elections of Paris were the final blow that struck apart for ever the Left (in which Robespierre mingled and which he was to lead) from the Gironde.

On that quarrel hangs the future fortune of the Revolution. And I will therefore beg my reader to permit some analysis of its nature. Its origins have appeared more or less obscurely in my last chapter, because it was there necessary to enter into the confused details of Robespierre's public attitude. When the story of the personality is left aside for a moment, and the general field of '92 is regarded, the salient relief of the year is the contrast, and at last the opposition of the Gironde and the extreme Left. What was the grievance against the Gironde?

It is universally appreciated that men of a high political idealism find difficult or impossible the discipline necessary to prolonged common action in an assembly. Even when the issue is absolutely clear (as for instance when it is the defence or the independence of

[1] 338 to 187. There were nearly 400 abstentions, probably due to the fact that the great disturbance was not yet ended: 200 more voted at Danton's election the next day.





one's country), the tendency of the mass to disintegrate is apparent; when the main principle of common action has been achieved the disintegration appears to become a fatal necessity, and enthusiasts of this kind that are, as it were, picked infantry for a charge, lose the faculty for defending a position.

The system of party does not rely for its motives, but depends for its bond upon the distribution of patronage. It is deepest rooted where a state is governed by its wealthy citizens; throughout the world, the permanence, tradition, and organisation of the teams of public debate are strong in proportion to the magnitude of public salaries, and one might almost add to the unreality of the issues that are discussed.

It stands to reason, therefore, that he who is possessed of any political creed, or that has received a revelation of political justice, will be the worst of materials for the exercise of this base and necessary method of cohesion. Nor is this all. There is in such passionate convictions a potentiality of high differentiation, which is the despair of historical philosophy. The apostles, the reformers of every age of conviction, turn that age to a battlefield. It would seem as though the nearer one pushed up towards the central truth which inspires men with certitude, and puts their awful energy into the creeds, one got nearer also to the general paradox by which that central unity is itself the origin of all differences, the creator of infinite tones and colours. Whether we are dealing with the irresistible advance of the Christian Church throughout its early development, or with the triumph of a political system (as in the case of the Revolution), or with a profound economic change, which may be the form of our next new development, the advance of such conquerors can never be like that of an army, but must always be like that of a tide; eddying, self-returning, appreciable only in the mass, and

out of such contradictions come the only enduring things.

This tragic part of faith, that it impels the most violent energies into the smallest details of the creed is undoubtedly the underlying cause of the great quarrel which had first arisen in the debate on the war in December and January, which had broken out openly when, in the spring, Robespierre and Brissot had made targets of each other in the Jacobins, and which this high moment of the Revolution forced into its final form compelling either faction to attempt the destruction of the other.

Of the Gironde as the chiefs of the opposition the Mountain had been jealous; in the Gironde as crusaders, the Mountain had seen contemptible fanatics—possibly allies of the Court. In the Gironde, political, and therefore necessarily intriguing, working through boudoirs, and weaving cabals, the Mountain had discerned that impure element of compromise which from the very opening of the States-General the extreme Left had fought as their principal enemy. When they met in Madame Roland's room, Desmoulins and Robespierre knew how the chairs stood round; they knew the footstool. They saw Barbaroux, Gensonné, Brissot, Guadet form a coterie ruling them and persuading France.

I have said that Brissot and Robespierre were the two opposite types upon which we can fix to appreciate the acerbity of the struggle. You may also see it in the breach between the two comrades, Robespierre and Pétion. It is developed and recognised when Danton, in the garden of the ministry on a famous day in August, drives Roland and Servain where he chooses like domestics. All that Girondin spirit had depended upon the unrealities of '92, the restricted suffrage, the uncertain power of the Court, the upper-class tradition of security, the upper-class illusions with regard to the nature of social discipline, and—if the word convention can be

used, of minds so lofty and erect as those of Vergniaud, Pétion, and Isnard—upon the upper-class convention that manners are in some part a chief component of political talent.

The 10th of August had brought all the realities of the inner fires to the surface, and in the test of sheer democracy the Gironde receded, took on the defensive. The Mountain grew and turned master.

Until the 10th of August the forces of either were in great part allied. All the quarrels at the Jacobins, all the contempt or envy, on the one hand, against the men who sat round Madame Roland—against "the drawing-room" —on the other all the hatred or disdain of statesmen for extremists had been, in the main, inferior to the general action of the Revolution. Both factions had exercised their principal energies in watching, at last in combating the Crown. It was the Gironde, not the Mountain, that had launched Paris at the King on the 20th of June; it was neither the one nor the other that had forced the Tuileries; each could accuse the other of violence and demagogy, each could accuse the other of hesitation. Both were united against an enemy that might overwhelm them with the first success of Brunswick: the 6000 armed in the Tuileries, the monarchy upright, menacing the end of all their common creations. The 10th of August in destroying this common enemy destroyed the bond. It was apparent that the Gironde survived, and that the full victory of its republican theory was too great for its temper to bear. Roland, with his white hair and venerable, quiet voice, reminded one of nothing but the past: Vergniaud had the good manners of oratory, he was a great gentleman by right of the quality of his genius: there could be felt in him the future Defender of the King. Brissot was the intrigue of early '92, blundering on into a time as little fitted for intrigue as molten metal is to chiselling; Guadet was the personal quarrel

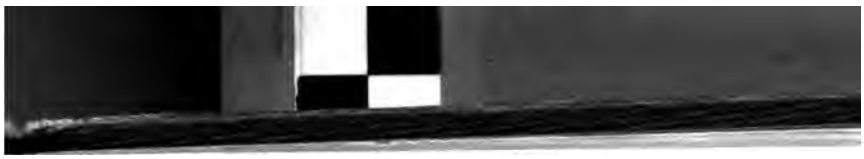
of March carried on into September; Isnard, in a time that was listening from day to day for the news of a fresh disaster, stood for the forgotten fever in which war had been determined.

Therefore throughout August Robespierre and all the Mountain had deliberately mixed with the insurrectionary Commune; had taken a species of delight in asserting its authority over the dying Legislative Assembly. It was the opportunity for revenge, or perhaps, in Robespierre's own case (and he was the most determined opponent of reconciliation), the opportunity for imposing a complete democracy upon men who by their view and manner, if not by their professions, diverted and corrupted, as he thought, the republican spirit. Already the accusation of "Federalism," of weakening the country by an excessive local autonomy, of not grasping the peril of France, had been launched against them; already they had begun to chafe against the Commune [1] and to accuse the Mountain of arbitrary violence, when the massacres of September came, to brand all that division in deep upon the soul. Terror, disgust, the sense of the provinces behind them, led the Gironde to a definite attack on Paris, to a policy of separating Paris out as a criminal, and therefore inevitably to a policy of decentralisation: invasion or no invasion. Paris answered with the Elections. She chose her primaries four days before the massacres. She began voting at their close, she voted on for close on a fortnight more [2]—and she did not repudiate the slaughter.

I have said that Robespierre had nothing to do with the lynching. It is true of practically all the Mountain. Still the twenty-four whom Paris elected were very nearly the list of the *Ami du Peuple*, and Marat himself was

[1] They broke the Commune. Then they repealed their vote; then later, on August 30, they summoned it to the bar of the Assembly, and then they gave way for the second time.

[2] Till the 19th.





chosen seventh. The great misunderstanding which ended in the Terror had been launched with a sufficient cause. The pure eyes of the Gironde could become—as they remained to the scaffold—indignant eyes condemning outrage: the conquering energy of the Mountain could seem a sword of justice in the hand of the Republic, cutting down treason and rebellion within, parrying and guarding on the border.

From the first meeting of the Convention with closed doors and under empty galleries in the empty hall of the Tuileries, from the first public session when they trooped into the Manège and saw the Legislative melt out and lapse into the streets,[1] there appeared in Robespierre the one thing then necessary to his success; he admitted violence and fell in with the spirit of his supporters.

He was conspicuously lacking in all that we know in history to belong to leaders. He abhorred their peculiar vices; he had not so much as heard of their principal qualities. The communion that your leader has with men, his corporate character, was a thing utterly unknown to Robespierre, it could have found no place in his exclusive and positive logic. The leader's vague but irresistible mandate seemed to him non-existent, a fiction of parasites; the leader's necessary seizure of power, when, in special dangers, the organised mass demands animation and unison, seemed to him a common usurpation. Throughout the Revolution the men who had something in them of that magic of the leader he suspected, tracked, and, if he could, destroyed. He saw it and hated it in Dumouriez, he tasted it and opposed it in Vergniaud. Perhaps later the jar of it in Danton led him to the betrayal of that friend. The men that sum up other men and evoke loyalty must sin in two ways, by the concupiscence

[1] The outgoing and incoming Parliaments were curiously careful to maintain a continuity of authority. With the King a prisoner and the permanent officials in disorder, it was a necessity.

of power and by the fondness for boon companions; they come to find in either vice a necessary food. They exist by an insatiate superiority, and they enlarge and temper this insolence by a genial lenience for, and commonly a participation in, the feast of the senses. Both these sins were odious to Robespierre. He was designed uniquely to register and to express: he could never inspire. Yet he became a kind of leader—he led more than armies; at last he all but imposed a religion.

This paradox is the theme of every page in which his name appears. It proceeded, as I have said continually throughout this book, from the sharp and deep impression which one face of his metallic spirit had struck into the popular mind. The people took his name, put it up for a *Labarum*, and under the veil of the name they raised the man himself; but something more was needed to produce the short accident of his final pre-eminence. He had to avoid the checks that would have diverted so gradual and insistent a progression as was his towards power. How was it that in '89 he avoided the officialism to which he was tempted and which would have buried him? In '90 that he kept the sympathy of the priests? In '91 that he restrained the Jacobins? In early '92 that he could oppose the war? There was in all that precaution an element of political intrigue and, at last, of ambition, but much the most of it was the chance of his character. His temper made the statesmen his enemies; their enmity forced him into the channel that led straight to '94; the pressure of that enmity forbade the least divergence.

So now a circumstance, fortunate for the moment, preserved the dominion of Robespierre by permitting him to abandon his reserve, his bitter generalities and his innuendoes of the earlier part of the year. Paris demanded champions; the Gironde, which was the

majority of the Convention, the executive power, the provinces—almost the Republic—charged against the deputation of Paris; the twenty-four. Robespierre undertook the defence, and that with an extraordinary unity of action; he let everything leave his mind save the interest of a ceaseless direct attack upon the coterie of the Rolands and the weaving into that attack of his ancient formulæ.

In this he had no rival. He was alone with the people. Marat, without weight or balance, giving pleasure only to fools and even by fools never followed: Marat, who had not hesitated to conceive the massacres of September, was not a target. He had to be killed before he could be deified. The Gironde made him a butt or held him up as an excuse for their violence, but even were he overthrown (as five months later they would have overthrown him by trial); even were he murdered (as ten months later he was murdered), Marat's fall was not the fall of the Mountain. Danton was occupied in the larger things. He was reaping the fruits of Valmy, attempting to preserve the neutrality of England; his mind was full of the armies, he was weary of the crisis that paralysed the Convention; he would have reconciled.

Robespierre alone was plunged and absorbed in that political struggle. He accepted the burden of Paris and took upon his misshapen shield with unalterable fixity of purpose all the spears of the Gironde, while outside his mind, unheeded, rushed the autumn of '92.

Here, as in every written attempt to explain the man, one must omit the background. Yet it is perhaps the greatest picture in history; the first rising of the nation, the armies driven to the frontier before the south-westerly gales of that autumn, the charges under the torn sky of Jemappes.

These things passed beside him in his self-absorption,

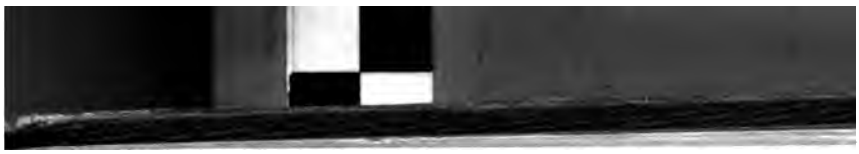
and even in that great time it is only in debate and writing and through the mind that you find him revealed.

Valmy passed; the invasion was thrust back home; the cheers and singing of Jemappes ran through Paris; Dumouriez, turned to an idol, was planning what miracles of exterior politics might be worked with his victorious and ragged army—running to Paris to intrigue, driving back to the frontier to intrigue. Europe, both central and remote, was being sucked into the whirlpool of what was to be a universal war. But Robespierre, all the mornings, sat in the little room above the carpenter's shed writing of himself and democracy; all the afternoons pursued the tireless theme at the Manège; all the evenings reiterated it at the Jacobins: preaching self and equality and giving the Gironde the blows that Paris delighted to see given.

New expressions came to his pen. Names, insults, and direct venom; a habit extraneous to his character. It was one of those moments of extreme vigour that diversified his progress, a recollection of the last week of Arras, of the nights of July '91 in the club. And to the natural heat of such a moment a long memory of accusation and domestic humiliation added the personal note: awoke vanity a little and stirred him.

For, as I have said, it was his enemies that put this new power into him.

Consider the nature of his experience and the nature of his suffering beneath it, during this past year of 1792. Commonly silent when the radicals had met in the spring at the Hotel Brittanique and made a court for Madame Roland; knowing that in his frequent absence, after his early departures, he was mentioned only for his awkwardness in such good company; less virile than these Buzots and young Barbaroux, ungenial, pretentious, he had in their presence something of what the poor feel in the houses of the rich—shame, self-defence, and





secret angers. Consider also with what profound sincerity he suspected all that world. If he, a virtuous man, was so ridiculous, where was their virtue? He noticed their elegance, their memories of society; he saw them plotting combinations and policies together. He saw that hiding of self which is peculiar to good breeding. (Absolute sincerity tempered in a sharp creed is like a steel instrument of surgery.) With this he probed the falsity of Dumouriez; he laid bare the inner nerve of meddlesomeness that inspired Brissot's activity, and he remained silent. They knew that he knew them.

These men had become the ministry. The Rolands had been installed in their magnificent Hotel of the Home Office in the Rue Neuve des Petits Champ. There had been modest banquets, stoical splendours, many servants and lights round the table of the Gironde. They had been power, when he had behind him only a Paris without votes, the leadership of the Jacobins and the adoration of simple men. Then came the war, the war that the Girondins made, and that he had consistently opposed. It had gone ill. The populace had risen under the menace of Brunswick and overthrown the Court, and, in the rush, destroyed also the platform on which the gentlefolk and the decent philosophers had built up an Utopia. The populace had lifted up suddenly to a great eminence all that he represented and led: he could not forbear from revenge, and the men who belonged to the Rolands could not forbear from attacking him, from destroying him if possible, lest his immense popularity should make him a master, and they and their Republic should be drowned in the flood of Paris.

Brissot, in the *Patriote Français*,[1] at the very opening of the Republic, on the 22nd of September, raised an alarm against him, spoke of the "Demagogues": Buzot, two days later, in the open Parliament asked "If

they were the slaves of the members for Paris," urged and carried a committee to watch and menace Paris, demanded a guard from the departments; and said all this, turning to the benches of the Mountain, and thrusting out a gesture against Robespierre. La Source asked, "What was Paris more than any other department?" Rebecqui, on the same day, the 25th (it was the stormiest of the early debates), said in so many words, "We know the truth at Marseilles: a party aims at the dictatorship and Robespierre is its head."

Robespierre accepted the challenge. Hitherto, since the 10th of August, he had but agreed with the Commune and shown himself a frank partisan of the city which he represented. Now he consented to become a weapon and to strike at the heart of the provincial clique in which Paris discovered inefficiency, lukewarmness, disintegrating federalism, the loss of the State. His action was the easier because his enemies fell into the error common to passion—they expressed tendencies and general dangers as facts and particular perils. Robespierre was as yet but an enormous reputation: they tried to prove against him, as in a court of law, the absurd charge of tyranny and attempted dictatorship. He was senior member of the group that included Marat: they attempted to fasten on him the horror of September. To rebut such charges was an easy triumph. He heard Rebecqui out, noted him like a lawyer, took the tribune, and, as an athlete a weight, sustained irony for two hours.

"It was good for the Republic and worthy of Marseilles that any danger of preponderance should be watched and extinguished as it rose. Rebecqui had thought to discover that danger, and had named its author. The principal safeguard of the Republic was this heroic jealousy and suspicion."

He spoke prodigiously of himself and all he had done for the Revolution. He was careful in his

articulation and touched every enemy with the point of a rapier: to Pétion in the chair he recalled their friendship, but he smiled unpleasantly as he recalled it. Every interruption of the majority he bore out with patience. He took up the thread of his speech when the protest was spent, laboured and succeeded in making the masters of the Convention ridiculous. He advertised his person to the hundreds of new obscure deputies that had come up from the provinces under the terror of September; that had been taught to fear Paris—and Robespierre as the master of Paris. These men came round a little later; their influence began to support the Mountain; they began to weaken the Gironde.[1]

This 25th of September was then, in spite of the fluctuating majority, an open victory for Robespierre. Young Barbaroux, "Barbaroux of Marseilles" (who spoke of himself in the third person, a noble trick), supported Rebecqui: quoted a chance phrase of Panis that Robespierre would make a good dictator. It fell flat. Vergniaud himself could not save the Gironde from the effect of the debate. Robespierre went forward. He enlarged over the Jacobins; he caused them that day to begin their proscriptions by the exclusion of Brissot. He felt himself in the saddle; called up his brother and sister from Arras; established his whole household and the small accumulation of its fortune in the house of the Rue St. Honoré. He began to issue his lengthy journal, "Letters to my Constituents," by which he could get into touch with the support of the whole city as in the Convention he touched the galleries with his voice, and received from them, as it were, the ratification of Paris.

[1] It is characteristic of Robespierre that the best notes on which to reproduce this scene and speech are contained in Robespierre's own account in the first number of his "Letter to my Constituents." There are also, however, the *Moniteur* and the *Débats* of the day.

It is impossible to omit a reference to these papers. His indefatigable pen, his close bent attitude of the spectacled writer, his endless phrasing stood out from all the words of them. "It is not enough to overthrow a throne: our business is to raise upon its ruins a holy equality and the imprescriptible rights of man. One empty word does not create a republic; it is made rather by the character of its citizens. The soul of the Republic is virtue, that is, the love of one's country and a large-hearted devotion that merges private into public interests," and so forth, for nearly thirty pages. Save when he is describing his own speech, he is reiterating all the commonplaces of the liberals, the exact phrases of early '92, of '91, of '90. The interest of it lies not so much in the evidence it affords of his one incessant note, as in the quality of the public attention that never wearied of it. It is only in times of high fervour approaching delirium that humanity can tolerate such repetitions. So in "revivals" men and women sway ecstatic to phrases they have heard a thousand times.

All October he maintained the steady fire of his pamphlets, the pressure of the club upon the Parliament; Dumouriez returning victorious, he consented to embrace him in a famous scene; he took care to avoid the trail of Marat, he concentrated upon the Gironde. He spoke little at the Convention, but after standing over the deputies for a month as the menace of Paris, he provoked a second scene on the 29th of October. Again he listened with patience to the Gironde and he replied again at great length and with insistent and controlled acidity to the long diatribe of Louvet: he had the triumph of hearing himself definitely accused of attempting power. He put off for a week the solemn defence in whose ritual he delighted, and when the day came, on the 5th of November, he issued from the ordeal to the applause of Paris in the galleries. By a

vote nearly unanimous the Parliament left him innocent; in the evening, as his custom was, he went to the Jacobins to hammer in the blow. The occasion was too great for him to tell his own triumph. Merlin of Thionville and Manuel gave the epic of the day under the smile of Jean-Bon St. André in the chair: all the radicals. And who was the last to bring his homage? Garnier of the Aube, the unknown man who was in Thermidor to drag down Robespierre with a Phrase.

I have no space to give in full the rear-guard action that the Gironde fought after this defeat. November is full of it. Louvet, to whom the Parliament had refused the right of reply—so utterly had his attack failed—published a ridiculous pamphlet called "Robespierre and his Royalists": Roland sent it out broadcast at the public expense.[1] The newspapers of the Gironde, wealthy and official, continued more moderately than before but with equal insistence to strike at the pedestal that supported Robespierre; but though the Gironde was the Government and (a fact not without importance) the last tradition of culture, the great party could neither weaken the man nor the city that opposed it. Paris filtered, as it were, into the Convention; its central information the colour of passion it leant to that knowledge; the more exact memories it possessed of the King's treason, of the nature of the old and discredited compromise, affected these provincials. Deputies lodging scattered up and down Paris suspected the capital less and absorbed more of its temper. Day by day and debate by debate small groups and individuals broke off from the majority upon which the power of the Girondins depended.

Here is an anecdote that shows the kind of resistance the party met with in its new methods of self-defence

[1] Among other places, to Arras. The town council, proud that one fellow-citizen of theirs should be so famous, replied to Roland in a very angry letter.

and the kind of thing that ultimately ruined it. Gorsas was editing his "Courrier of the 83 departments" on the lines that his clique demanded, regularly attacking the senior member for Paris. He suffered from an illusion common to editors and believed as he wrote that he was but a mouthpiece of the people, yet he believed he could say what he chose and that it would still be the people that were saying it. A shock roused him from such complacency.

His paper received a letter (printed on the 14th of November) asking why Robespierre was attacked suddenly after a particular date. The writer was a subscriber from the foundation of the paper: he had read Gorsas all these three years writing the regular praises of the typical revolutionary, and he did not understand the change. Gorsas could not answer the truth; perhaps he hardly recognised it himself. He could not say, "You see, we of the Gironde are poets, with a fine vision of our generous and equal republic; we are gentlemen, we hate violence and we are good orators and statesmen: we are menaced by the position of the Convention in this turbulent capital, and the vast popularity of Robespierre in that capital frightens us. We must break it if we can. Moreover, we find his character exasperating; he is a *dévot* to a creed, and he has joined and will lead the party of massacre." Gorsas could not, I say, plead in this fashion, so he simply answered (in his issue of the 20th) that, "He with his own ears had heard Robespierre talking of God to a crowd." Imagine the effect of such a reply upon the worthy citizen to whom it might be addressed! One thing the Girondins failed in, and it was their ruin. They could never touch and feel the people.[1]

[1] For instance, Madame Roland, the daughter of a small shopkeeper and artisan, complains on the supreme night of her arrest of the smell of the crowd.

Of fifty such pieces of journalism I choose one other, because it expresses with admirable exactitude the complaint against Robespierre. It is not just; it neglects the sincerity that dominated and still absorbed Robespierre's temptations of vanity or ambition; it proceeds from the pen of a man in the Lucretian tradition of Diderot, grandly indignant with religions, and irritated that the name of God should still linger so tenaciously. But the man was very great, and he has driven his chisel in deep. It is Condorcet's.

". . . And there are some who ask why there are always so many women hanging round Robespierre: at his house, in the galleries of the Jacobins and of the Convention. It is because this Revolution of ours is a religion, and Robespierre is leading a sect therein. He is a priest at the head of his worshippers. . . . Robespierre preaches; Robespierre censures; he is furious, grave, melancholy, exalted—all coldly; his thoughts flow regularly, his habits are regular; he thunders against the rich and the great; he lives on next to nothing; he has no necessities. He has but one mission—to speak, and he speaks unceasingly; he creates disciples . . . he has every character, not of the maker of a religion, but of the originator of an opinion; he has an ascetic reputation about him . . . he talks of God and of Providence; he calls himself the friend of the humble and the weak; he gets himself followed by women and by the poor in spirit; he gravely receives their adoration. . . . He is a priest, and will never be other than a priest. . . ."[1]

That is how Condorcet saw, despised, and was oppressed under the rising fame of a man who was destined to catch France, as he had caught Paris, under the singular

[1] Hamel quotes all this at great length (ii. 522), and, what is very remarkable, he here admits one of the few sober criticisms made upon his hero. The original essay may be read in full in the *Chronique de Paris* for the 9th November 1792.

attraction of his grave self-exposition and the ceaseless similar activity of his mind. But Robespierre added much that autumn to the little Condorcet saw in him. He that had taken a brief for Paris, followed up like a duty all the Parisian attacks on the early hesitation of the Convention, and consented to lose a great part of his united theory. He began to demand (for the sake of the Revolution) policies inconsistent with his Rousseau, he left his deductions somewhat. This abandonment of a part of himself, this transformation in him, which grew to be so conspicuous in the winter of '93, is first clearly settled for history in December '92.

Let me describe with special insistence the outset of this new career, in which passions distinct from his unpassionate soul lit Robespierre, as it were, from without. The phase of transition began with the King's trial; by the time Louis had suffered, Robespierre had been struck irretrievably by the storm, and drove before it. The King and Robespierre are the opposing poles of that autumn.

I can see, between the victim of the Convention and the man who was leading a resolute minority in, and was soon to be the master of, the Convention, a sharp and dramatic contrast: a contrast not only of circumstance (that is evident), but also of mood.

The beginning of the King's agony coincided with the beginning of Robespierre's great advance and satisfaction, and of the two gates the one man passed through the ivory, the other through the horn: one was compelled or permitted by his fate to touch the first truths; the other was snared into the illusion that ended in his ruin.

I will not pretend that real things are sad to men; God made real things, and all that God has made is good. But when a man or a class has lived remote and shielded in an unreal world, the first plunge into reality is a shock like the transition of death. Gentlemen

know it when they fall to the common condition of the world.

For Louis, then, all in those December and January days became the trouble of being an ordinary man in adversity, the sadness of reality, the reality of winter daylight, of long nights without sleep, of rain, and almost of despair. But for religion it would have been despair. Louis, accused, tried, condemned, fell back upon the one character in him that gave stuff to his unfortunate smallness—he became simple, and in his calamity his simplicity grew conspicuous. When, on the 11th of December, he had first appeared before the Convention, it was after a morning in which he had breakfasted with his wife and children, in which he had played a quiet game with his little son, in which he had insisted upon petty but pathetic details in the matter of his clothing, in the matter of his right to privacy. He had gone out into the drizzle painfully, unshaven, stooping, and pale, still gross in body, his brown coat his principal care, and had said little as they drove to the Parliament.

Seated before the Convention he had refused to admit his signatures to a hundred documents where his hand was only too plainly apparent; it was puerile, but so human that the chord of pity was again touched. Once even he did admit his hand, at the foot of some pension or bribery or other, saying that "*that* was indeed his signature, for it was an act of charity." It was imbecile, but no one could fail to see the plain man instructed by lawyers.

When he returned under the rain from the Parliament, Chaumette, the most bitter journalist of the republicans, the secretary of the new Commune, sat beside him in the carriage, and the King was still more an ordinary, unfortunate man.

They spoke a few words upon the bread they were eating—unhappy communion. The King, fatigued, left

part of the loaf aside. Chaumette had a scruple in throwing it out of the window: "his grandmother had told him as a child that the waste of bread was a great sin." Louis, torpid and automatic, his bulging eyes lapsing into stupor, made some kind of reply; said this grandmother was evidently a woman of sense. The King noted mechanically the streets through which the carriage passed; made stupid and simple remarks upon their history and appearance. Chaumette replied to him as one traveller vulgarly met with another of equal insignificance might reply to the commonplaces of a stage-coach. All these silly little human details the people heard, and Louis became for them what he had never yet become—an ordinary man, a fool like any one of us.

For a fortnight the prosecution was abandoned, while above it raged the increasing quarrel of the Mountain and the Gironde. When later Louis was again before his judges the hesitation that must always take men upon the eve of those legal decisions which involve the life of a man sharpened this advocate of his —the pity of the general people. The majority was so small, in the case of some of them self-contradiction was so evident, that the deputies of the Convention seemed themselves to be the accused.

His passion, his last will, his tearing from his family, these throughout France, and, alas, throughout Europe, became the subject of I know not how many prints, pamphlets, ballads. I have before my eyes as I write the best known of the pictures that swelled the English propaganda: in this, with the most ridiculous nobility of feature, he is seen breaking away in the awful morning of his execution from his wife (to whom is lent a very inconsistent dignity), and from his children, who are evidently made in that picture the children of all of us.

When a man commits a great crime those who

(driven by the necessities of a common religion or of politics) undertake his defence, can never resist the temptation to a gross unreasonableness. They will present his sufferings to you continually: they will take for granted with a smile or with a violent ellipsis of indignation, that no proofs of his guilt exist. They postulate innocence, refuse to plead, and harp day after day upon his punishment. So it was with Louis, but a man would be over-bitter who in these days of ours, now that the quarrel against monarchy has been so thoroughly settled, should grudge him the unreasoning consolation of loyalty that he received.

To deny that he had been guilty of treason is simply to deny the right of a nation to safeguard its own defence, and to deny that the executive is the servant of the national interest. But there was in the ceremonial of the old monarchy which has now departed from Europe something which could easily disturb an intellect so infirm; nor will any one who values justice deny that the man who brought such incalculable misfortunes upon his country had acted on his lights of honour, had avoided a breach between his own soul and the judgment of God. The caricaturists did well when they represented him in every ignominious detail, yet passing into Paradise.

The day came for his death, and again under clouds that had covered the sky throughout that month, pursued by the damp, unwholesome chill that for a month had been the atmosphere of his tragedy, he went out of life under all the circumstances which can most throw man back upon himself: there is something naked and therefore sublime in his departure.

Against this set what had happened to the man who as a boy eighteen years before had read that speech to his young King in the premier college of the university. Illusion surrounded Robespierre throughout that trial;

the illusion that he was in some way a victim, the illusion that the Commune was the nation, and could rightly press upon the Parliament, the illusion that the people whose hold over the executive was still a dogma at the back of his mind, was in this special case forbidden from judging (for he knew by how vast a majority the nation was opposed to the death of the King), the illusion that his consistent opposition to the penalty of death could in the case of a character like his own find an exception for a despot—that inconsistency was to lead him to watch the Terror unmoved, and perhaps to use it as a weapon. Above all he suffered the illusion that a man can bargain with his own faith and yet remain all himself.

When, in the last days of November, Cambon had proposed the suppression of the salaries of the Church—on the same occasion that Danton, just off for the armies, made his short and famous defence of popular religion—Robespierre insisted that the way out of their difficulties, financial and all, was the immediate arraignment of the King.[1]

Five days later, on the 3rd of December, he delivered in the Convention his principal speech upon the culpability of Louis.

Already he had passed down so many steps in his lapse from the character of his part. He had already found his ambitions. He had defended the Commune against the Legislative in August like a partizan; he had turned quite suddenly to a ritual use of the word "Republic"; he, the opponent of the war, had illogically flattered the lyrical enthusiasm that prepared Valmy—an enthusiasm he did not comprehend, and which yet he consented to serve. So now in an even and unaccented speech there appeared incongruously his determination to

[1] The speech also contains a further example of his regular support of the priests. I omit it because it would only interrupt the purely political action with which I am here concerned.

be the Lector of the new republican world, in which he so bitterly envied the Girondins their place of rhetoricians, and of which he was jealously to watch for a short time Danton, as the powerful executive. Thus he speaks of the necessity "of disregarding the kings, and of considering only the establishment of liberty and of a republic." For the first time in his life he permitted to pass his lips the demand for the death of a man.

It is by no accident that for three years of increasing violence he almost alone of the revolutionaries had never threatened death even in the vaguest terms; had not spoken of the sword of the law, nor cried with Isnard that the axe of the Revolution awaited traitors. It was consistent with his whole mind, with the whole development of his youth, to find such things repugnant; it was consistent also with that hesitation he always had in leaving principles to speak of men. His demand for death, therefore, though upon this first occasion it was exceptional, though it was with regard to what he sincerely did believe to be the greatest of political crimes, and an occasion never to be repeated, yet certainly had something in it of deflection from the very narrow path and strait which he had followed since first he read his Rousseau alone in the fields by the Scarpe; and into that deflection the ambitions of his new leadership undoubtedly entered as a cause.

A day or two later he descended to permitting at the Jacobins the destruction of the bust of Mirabeau; Duplay proposed it—(he can hardly have done so of his own initiative); Robespierre in a kind of false enthusiasm supported a proposition of which he was not improbably the author. But even here when he was doing what a crowd willed, his lack of proportion and his abstraction appeared, for in denouncing Mirabeau he must also denounce Helvetius, whose bust stood somewhere in the

hall, and whom he remembered Rousseau to have hated.[1]

The Gironde noted and laughed. They dragged back into the light the forgotten day when Robespierre had proposed the Pantheon for Mirabeau's funeral, and Robespierre, in the meshes of his new self-contradiction, was at the pains to publish a laborious and hardly successful apology.

The attitude upon which I am now insisting continued throughout the trial of the King. He seemed on one occasion to argue like any Herbert in favour of an immediate and arbitrary execution, and became for a moment the target of a violent and physical opposition in the Parliament. The hold that he was getting upon that mob of Paris for which the Girondins had conceived a terror and an abomination, pointed him out already as a possible master, and when Guadet, accusing him of a kind of despotism, forced Robespierre to a protest, that protest was met by repeated threats of arrest from all sides of the hall, but the extreme Left: a curious rehearsal of a scene that was in eighteen months to destroy him. He was driven from the tribune, came up into it again, received some support from the Mountain to which such scenes were lending cohesion and discipline, reaffirmed his demand for the King's immediate trial, and ended his unsuccessful speech in a silence, which perhaps his own calm had in a fashion imposed upon his opponents.

When Louis appeared at the bar Robespierre defended the action of the Commune in the rigour of the imprisonment it had imposed upon the King. On the 23rd of December, three days before the date of the King's second appearance and final trial, Robespierre again spoke, this time at the Jacobins, saying that those who might upon

[1] He spared Priestley, of whom he knew, I presume, neither good nor ill, and whose bust, crowned with faded laurels, stood third.

that occasion appear to promote delay should be treated as suspects, that those even should be treated as suspects who did not actively vote for immediate condemnation. He was even at the pains of ridiculing the defence made by Desèze, and on the 27th, in a speech of excessive length, he hammered round his main point, that had the King been an ordinary criminal with such proof of treason against him, any court would have settled the matter in twenty-four hours. He treated with an angry contempt the proposition that the judgment of Louis should be referred to a popular vote, and his bitterness was greater because he knew that he was plunging deeper and deeper into contradictions of himself. There was a note of threatening never heard before from his lips, and only to reappear long after when he had become something of a master. "Citizens, it is to be decided whether you are rebels or the benefactors of humanity." When it was cast up against him that this demand for an immediate and summary vengeance was that of but a small minority in the nation, he threw away all his past for an hour and defended such minorities; spoke like any don of "the virtue which is always to be discovered in minorities."

The road he had taken drove him into mere sophistry; of all methods the most naturally odious to a consistent man.

That attitude of Paris and of Robespierre was answered in the most famous of Vergniaud's speeches. It has been turned into a defence of the King. It was not that. It was the hesitation of a man who can see many things at once, and who fears immediate decisions. He knew Europe. He saw the approach of madness over the nation, the great ring of wars. He heard the cries in the street against the King, the pressure of the crowd, and with the presentiment that haunted all the Gironde he felt the shadow of death sweep over the

hall as the mob rolled past outside. He had haunting him as he spoke that terrible illiterate Commune of '93, the great menace to all the older time—and the Girondins for all their democracy were the spirit and culture of the older time. That Commune was sitting and watching a mile away. At Vergniaud and all of his, all the balancing Gironde, the scornful suspicions of the Left were thrown in one phrase, "Remember the sense of justice that is still somewhere in you, like a lamp left in a tomb."[1] To the Left these great men seemed cowards because they halted a little before Europe arming and the plunge into '93.

It was the afternoon of the 15th of January. The meagre light of winter had already faded, the three great groups of candles hung lit over the immense hall. The last of the discussion limped on past the dinner-hour, and after they had dined, the women of the Palais Royal, the coterie of Égalité, trooped in to tarnish what was most convinced and ascetic in the Republic with their venal and corrupt applause. The rich of the faction of Orleans sat there together determined on death. For one of them, Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau, death waited also. He was stabbed for his vote in a café of the Palais Royal, and on his mask that was modelled after death there still lies the smile of his birth and riches.

A roll-call of names began and a vote from each was demanded.

Robespierre came among the first by the accident of his election, the senior member for Paris. He had not so far caught, nor did he ever so far catch, the vigour of the great renewal as to achieve terseness; so when Vergniaud, presiding, called out "Robespierre," and when there was demanded of him (as of every member present in turn) an exact expression of his reasons for his vote, he lapsed into the literary verbosity which had suited

[1] The phrase is St. Just's.

the discussions of the year before, but which were so grotesquely out of place upon this terrible occasion when they could only recall his older and more consistent self. Of what kind must that man have been to have persisted even under the spell of tragedy in such long phrases as these? The importance of the occasion compels me to transcribe them. They are commonly neglected and very well worthy of remembrance. There is no space to give them in full.

"I have no taste for long speeches upon self-evident matters. They are of a sinister augury for the fortunes of liberty. I have ever made it a special point to leave aside the distinctions of logomachy, which only appear when there is a desire to evade the logical consequences of some recognised principle. I have never learned the art of dividing my political existence in such fashion as to find in myself two separate functions, that of the judge and that of the statesman. I am incapable of so outraging reason and justice as to regard the life of a despot as being of greater weight than that of common citizens, and of putting my intellect to the rack in order to save the greatest of criminals from a fate which the law pronounces against crimes far less grave, and which the law has already inflicted upon his accomplices. I will remain inflexible against oppressors, because I remain compassionate for the oppressed. I know nothing of that humanity which is for ever sacrificing whole peoples and protecting tyrants. The sentiment which drove me to beg from the Constituent Assembly the abolition of capital punishment, is the very same which to-day drives me to ask for its special application to the arbitrary ruler of my country, and to monarchy itself in his person. I have no occasion to prophesy or to conjure up future and unknown despots, and I will use no such vision to excuse me from striking this man whom I have

declared convicted as has, uniformly, this Assembly. I vote for death."[1]

This is, not in full but in its gist, the long declaration with which Robespierre confirmed his adhesion to the new political force, to the Commune which now wrapped him up, and in whose fortress he stood. It would not be just to him to read into it mere pedantry, as one can read mere pedantry into so many of his discourses; still less would it be just to cast ridicule in such a moment upon the too violent personal note which leads in every sentence, almost, with the word "I." It was not written; it was spoken. Rhetoric and the sting of a hundred insults; his violent and embittered quarrel with political opponents whom he certainly believed to be moderates, compromisers, and the enemies of liberty, gave him sufficient passion to make this outburst (in the ears of the Assembly) a piece of pure rhetoric; and it is specially to be noted that the very same quality which lent him his tenacity to principle gave him, when once he had departed from his own path, an obstinacy to continue in that false direction. He sat down flushed and angry, having thrown down a gauntlet at the Gironde. So one after another the Mountain voted—for the deputies of Paris came in a group—Danton especially rang over the hall in three lines: "I am not a politician; I vote for death."

The long night went on like an interminable litany. Men passed in and out of the hall to sleep, to eat, and to return. The dawn broke uneasily, a winter transition into a winter daylight. The short day passed and still one after another the coloured coats moved up from their benches to the tribune, turned round, and addressed their audience: cried in a loud voice: "Death absolute," "Death, but respite," "Banishment," "Imprisonment," each in his kind. One after another they signed the minute of their declaration, and went down the steps again to give way

[1] The whole may be found in the *Moniteur* of January 21, 1793.

to the next. The second evening came and they were still voting. Three hours passed in which the votes were unsealed, inscribed, and counted with the most exact care, then within an hour of midnight, before men exhausted and almost entered into a world of sleep, haunted with the terrors and the presentiments of sleep, Vergniaud, his own eyes drooping with the same fatigue, read out in his grave and peaceful voice: "It is with a profound sadness that I declare the majority of the Assembly to be for death."

Very few days remained. The appeal of Louis' counsel was rejected. Poor old Malesherbes[1]—short, vulgar, a hero—pleaded vainly; touching all, but achieving nothing. The appeal to the people, the last hope of the Gironde, was rejected. In the war and the public danger it appeared too much like an abdication of power. A letter from the King of Spain promising I know not what support, or threatening I know not what punishment, was rejected.

On the 21st Robespierre sat after the morning meal in the household of the Duplays. The youngest of the daughters asked him what was toward that the streets should be so full of people. He answered that there was that doing which she would do ill to see, and bade some servant go and shut the great outer door of the archway that gave upon the street.[2] Louis XVI. went by past the house with his gaolers and his priest in the lane of a vast and silent crowd. Before the midday meal the procession returned along that same Rue St. Honoré from the great square beyond. The line of the

[1] Every one should read of the death of this man of the old régime. A year later he waited calmly in his garden for his arrest, and on approaching the scaffold betrayed all the emotions of relief from the tedium of living.

[2] This story was told by Lebas, who had it from his aunt.

Capetians was broken and the last of the true kings was sunk in the quicklime of the Madeleine.

In that cold and ill-lit hour was let loose the fury of the governments of Europe, closed the Neutrality of England, and sacrificed the sympathy of America. When the door was unlocked and Robespierre reappeared among men it was to face problems and a turmoil which he had in part let loose, he that had so consistently opposed the armed crusade. Then a fortnight and France was at war with the whole world.[1]

[1] An exaggeration.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FALL OF THE GIRONDE

THE Girondins were struck and were falling. They never had been France, but only a superb opposition, opposing tyranny from the vague sky of the ideal. On the death of the King, who had stood for the positive tradition of the nation, they came to a last rally; with the spring season they fell. Their fall and their sacrifice are the other names for the establishment and growth of the Terror. France reseized herself with violence: out of her instinct for united government and for a head at Paris came the despotism of Paris over the departments, of the brain over the body.

I have insisted at such length in my last chapter upon the sharp five months of the struggle that lay between the imprisonment and the execution of the King, because that space had transformed Robespierre. He had entered it the idol rather than the chief of a political minority; he had been the cantator of the sacred texts, preaching, thinking himself a man oppressed by the regular forces of government and battering from below, in a hopeless opposition, what were then the sure foundations of the Gironde. The war, which he detested, had come. The palace which was the common enemy he saw half-allied with the drawing-room of Roland, with what he thought to be nothing but an intriguing clique;—Dumouriez and Brissot were in his eyes the leaders of this shameful cabal. He was perhaps the first at the Jacobins, but the club was still a battlefield. He had feared the 20th of June. In August he had

shut himself in at home, disappointed and disdainful on the eve of the assault on the Palace.[1]

In a day and a night, not by his work—by work done in spite of him—his whole position had changed. He was permitted to pass from opposition to action: the price to be paid for mingling with the Commune, and for accepting Paris and violence was his old consistency; he paid it. He consented to become in part the mouthpiece of that violence, in part only did he remain the professor and logician of the strict revolutionary theory. This compromise made him, long before January, the chief target of the moderates: of the pure visionaries, the great souls that surrounded Vergniaud. Having been singled out for their principal attack, he could not fail to reap the fruits of any victory against them. When months later the Gironde disappeared, as it was fated to disappear, it was to the profit especially of Robespierre who had not grasped the nature of its peril, who had attacked it only in debate.

The February of 1793 was an empty month of silence. That silence covered the slow convergence of the coalition. It was the moment of leisurely preparation with which the eighteenth century had hitherto introduced its wars[2] and corresponding to that leisure dragged on in Paris the sluggish inefficiency of the ministry and their supporters. The thing that was to overthrow them was indeed gathering in strength and unity: the Commune, re-elected in December, full of complaint and anger,

[1] Barbaroux was a vain, courageous, young and sensitive hero, as full of exaggeration as any other poet, but there is substantial truth in his account of his interview with Robespierre in the house of the Duplays, in his disgust at "the Shrine," and in his mention of Madame Duplay's protest that an insurrection would result in the death of Robespierre.

[2] For instance: war is declared on England and Holland on February 2. No general action is fought for weeks upon weeks. Spain withdraws her ambassador, yet there is no state of war till March 8.

an illiterate[1] populace, had had, though illiterate, a Girondin for its mayor, an excellent, respectable and rather famous doctor, one Chambon.[2] He had resigned the incongruous post and Pache had replaced him: Pache who had passed from the ministry of war, who felt the danger and was angered by the lack of control over the armies. That enduring thorn of the Revolution, famine, troubled Paris to the disorders of the 25th: the Jacobins meddled with "a republican constitution"; in the last days of the month the questions on the situation of the army were growing urgent: little groups threatened order in the streets. But as a whole the note of February was silence.

What had passed under the feeble hand of Roland, the ineptitude of Beurnonville[3] at the War Office, the intrigue of Dumouriez? There had arisen a combination of follies that promised the immediate success of the European governments and the overthrow of the Revolution. These follies had a common centre; they proceeded from a common but heroic folly, the deliberate theory of the Girondins and their refusal to touch earth. That party would not move by an inch out of those traditions of '91 and '92, the traditions of pure freedom, which were sacred to them in every circumstance, to which they could admit no exception even to save freedom itself. All the

[1] It is interesting to mark in the documents the gulf that lay between the insurrectionary Commune of the 10th of August (lawyers, doctors and dons) and that of December which was the practical result of their egalitarian theory and was purely popular. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is misspelling in every document issued from the Hôtel de Ville during the ensuing eighteen months.

[2] A curious career! He resigned a month after his election and took to writing of obstetrics, became an authority thereon, and died, secure in that wholly professional reputation, in 1826.

[3] Beurnonville is still a kind of byword for inefficiency in the French army. I quote from Boursier's book the famous despatch of the victory in which the loss of his brigade was "One drummer boy: slightly wounded: Thumb." Unused to colonial warfare, the French discover nothing but the comic in such despatches.

accidents of Freedom—the local autonomy, the power of the towns and the departments over their own resources, the voluntary recruiting of the army, the absolute independence of the law courts—things necessary to their perfect state—they refused to touch under any plea of emergency. Round the dwindling majority of such recalcitrance or prepossession Paris moved uneasily like the sea swelling under a false calm.

Questions began to be asked, the answers to them were delayed. The condition of the army was doubted. Was its wastage replaced? Had its discipline stood the inaction of the winter? Had the reinforcements Danton urged and carried passed beyond the mere vote? Were they in being? Had the Gironde, whose whole creed—never abandoned, leading them unchanged to the guillotine—was liberty, had they enforced the harsh decrees that pressed goods and men for the war? They were the Government, and their answers meant nothing.

There is this fatality attaching to the weak government of a great state, whether its faults be those of an untenable, untimely enthusiasm or those of sheer mediocrity, that its disasters cannot but be cumulative and reach a climax. It has no power of slowly retrieving its errors: the consequences of its folly heap up with an uncontrollable rapidity, propagating themselves. So it was with the Girondins. All February those great orators, full of the god, stood steadfast and disdainful before the menace of Paris, wrapped up in a vision of the Republic that should destroy the kings. And March answered all these questions which they had thought mere faction: which even from the mouth of Danton, returned from Belgium and almost the emissary of Dumouriez, they had refused to treat as a sign of the national danger.

The roll of evil news came in with the first days of the month; it continued uninterrupted, vastly in-

creasing till at its close sheer necessity and the imminence of death produced the Terror. On the 3rd Vendée rose, on the 4th the Austrians broke the French line in the north (how wastage had thinned it!), all the 5th and 6th Liège the republican, the one city that was a thorough friend in Belgium, ran bodily across the snow, men, women, and children, following the French rout, and flying from the old Austrian master, from the charge of the Hungarian sabres. At the opening of that week (Sunday, the 3rd) Brittany first moved; before its close the gathering reaction at Lyons reached its head; the royalists, the failing rich, the unemployed, the devout, all the enemies of the new and dreadful aspect of the armed Revolution, gave themselves a mayor who was a symbol of civil war. Unhappily for the Gironde, every man in France that regretted Privilege and the King called himself "Girondin." Lyons was within a few weeks of entrenching against the Republic.

On Thursday the 8th (all this being still rumour, either unknown or casting only a very vague, uneasy panic before it) Danton and Lacroix together challenged the government in the Parliament. "Tell us exactly the situation of the armies. Relieve the doubts of the city." Then as the executive refused to speak, these two men, the commissaries from Belgium, said that since the government was silent they would tell the whole story. Lacroix especially, the soldier, striking at the unsoldierly Beurnonville, implored action. He described the break-up of discipline in the winter, the quarrels and the doubts of Belgium, the rags and the hunger in the lines, the numbers of an orderly and veteran enemy rising against them continually.

"You decreed thirty thousand reinforcements. The army has received none."

And this piece of rhetoric was nearly true. Compulsion alone could raise all the drafts needed for this struggle—

a nation of civilians has never understood what is meant by the losses of an army at the front. But compulsion was odious and impossible to the Gironde.

This debate roused the Commune. Next day, Friday, and all Saturday the great black flag flapped in the driving wind from the towers of Notre Dame. The University saw it in the sky, the slums of the Boucherie saw it; the gunners out by the Invalides could not loose its little distant mark from their minds. The Faubourg St. Antoine down its narrow streets leading to the river (streets that frame the cathedral beyond) saw it and moved; all Paris began moving. Men went out from section to section calling for volunteers, saying there was not a moment, that Paris alone knew the truth, that the provinces would be too late. As the undetermined questioning crowd gathered outside the Hôtel de Ville, it could only find for its orders, like a pall, the great dark cloth covering the face of the building, and sewed on to it hugely in staring white letters the word "Danger": the motto that had introduced September.

Yet a perilous lethargy hung over the capital. The streets filled, there were cries for massacre in the Jacobins (and the Jacobins condemned the cries), but no single will impelled the thousands, they could find no point of attack, they eddied furiously upon themselves.

The Gironde feared a second September, and knew that this time they might be the victims. Louvet, not a cowardly man, went to the brave but cautious Pétion by night and told him that some one at the Jacobins had cried for "the purging of the Parliament." Pétion opened his window and thrust out his hand into the darkness. "Nothing will be done," he answered; "it is raining."

Nor was anything done of what was feared. Some hundreds broke into the printing offices of the Gironde's papers and destroyed the presses. Some hundreds

massed uncertainly near the Tuileries. On the next day, Sunday, the 10th, the Gironde still feared violence; in the debate that was the first step towards the Terror, their benches on the right were empty, and the extremists had no obstacle between them and the application of their remedy. If a tradition may be trusted, Vergniaud sat there alone with a great empty space about and behind him, making it his duty to protest even in that crisis against the stabbing of Liberty; but his protest led nowhere. For there was instituted, towards midnight on that Sunday, the high court that was to be the sword of the Terror: the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Commune had put its first pressure upon the Convention and a united government was begun.

It was Lindet's proposal—it might have come from almost any part of the half-empty hall. Only Vergniaud, proudly and defiantly sustained in its last hour, the theory of his band, the pure Republic. He moved that the voting should be by a roll-call of names.

"We wish to see who they are," he called through the silence, "that talk of killing Freedom in the name of Freedom."

The solemnity of that special voting could not affect the issue. One man even, desperate for a dictatorship that should save the country, opposed the nomination of a jury. The Convention dared not go so far. As it was, the judges were to be named by the Convention, the jury were to be chosen from Paris and the home departments—that was enough despotism even for such a moment. Before the dawn of Monday the Republic had been given its most un-republican instrument.

Sprung from the night and from peril, full of the inner fire of the Revolution, this tribunal needed but a motive power to send it out against the rebellion and against the kings. That spirit of life which was breathed

into it at last was the Great Committee. For the Great Committee was to prove the swordsman capable of using such a sword. Let me pursue the rapid and overwhelming month that created it.[1]

Even as they were voting the establishment of the court for treason Vendée had instituted a tribunal of her own, and at Machecoul had massacred the republicans. That was on the evening of the Sunday; on the Tuesday Dumouriez had issued and posted throughout Belgium a letter of revolt which has been condemned by many historians, but which was not without a great excuse, nor without its basis of truth. It said virtually, "I have failed, but the reason I have failed is that you have attempted I know not what insane crusade unknown to military history and lacking military knowledge. You have pillaged the churches, ridden over the people, and with that refused reinforcements. You have tried to make great phrases do the work of men." So frightened was the Gironde of what the publication of this letter might rouse in Paris that the government withheld it and kept it secret for a fortnight.[2]

Meanwhile the last and greatest blow fell upon this critical opening of the year. A week after writing that letter, half in treason, with an alternative policy in case of failure, but doubtless determined to win, Dumouriez assaulted the heights of Neerwinden. One portion of his army, the left under Miranda,[3] fought with stubborn-

[1] As a fact, the revolutionary tribunal, though decreed on March 10, did not begin sitting till April 2, and tried no case until the Committee of Public Safety had been formed.

[2] It was not published in Paris till March 26, but it was posted all over Brussels on March 12, the day it was written: from which discrepancy in dates it is argued that Dumouriez was already keeping a gate open for his later betrayal. So he was, as is proved by his publishing the letter in Brussels as a proclamation; but historians forget that it reached the government in Paris as early as the 15th.

[3] Miranda, a Peruvian, was valiant even for that valiant mixture of the Indian and the Spaniard. He was nothing but a soldier of fortune;

ness; it was opposed to the massed batteries of the Austrian right where the young Prince Charles was making his fictitious reputation at the head of the strongest position in the field. For seven hours Miranda broke himself without support or reserve up the slopes of the hill and against the concentrated fire. It may or may not have been the truth that Dumouriez was successful upon the right;[1] it is certainly true that he hated Miranda, that he had put Miranda upon the left with insufficient forces and that on Miranda's retreat he was himself compelled to fall back from the village that he was disputing.

The retreat was conducted without disorder, Dumouriez had made up his mind to treason. For a fortnight he parleyed easily with the enemy, taking them into his confidence, and turning them into a kind of allies.

During that period of doubt and fury, the Convention, still Girondin by its majority and bewildered, turned upon Danton. The one man who might have saved the unity of the Convention and who was willing to have made a buckler for the Girondins passed on the 1st April through a fire of taunt and invective that drove him for the moment into a frenzy.

It was upon that complex and perilous situation—the government known to be feeble, losing its majority; the strongest man on the Left suspected of complicity with a doubtful general; the Commune, crying out loudly against the inefficiency of the executive and willing to give almost any blow anywhere so that it could strike energy into the conduct of affairs—it was upon such a

fought for Guatemala, enlisted with the revolutionary French armies, returned to South America and helped the rebellions. He was taken by the Spaniards and died in prison at Cadiz in 1816.

[1] The evidence even on that plain point is not convincing. The most favourable to Dumouries is the account in his own memoirs.

welter that there fell the news of Dumouriez' treason. He had gone over to the enemy, despairing of the Revolution. His army had refused to follow; even the three German-speaking regiments, over whom the young Duc de Chartres hoped to exercise some influence, had remained loyal.

The supreme peril of revolutionary France has been variously placed by historians at several dates; it has been placed at the crisis of early September '92, when Brunswick had turned the position of the Argonne and was marching upon Paris; but at that time winter was on the side of the French, and Brunswick's army was but a vanguard of the great wars. It has been placed at the fall of Valenciennes in July '93: but at that time the Terror was alive; a dictatorship compelling armies and raising men daily by regiments out of the ground. I would rather put it at this moment of Dumouriez' treason. The crisis had in it something moral, more dangerous than anything that preceded or came after; it was evident that this great cavalry soldier, a man for a long time not without hope of glory in the revolutionary career, had shrugged his shoulders, despaired of doing anything more with such levies as the French had been reduced to and had thought the nation itself destroyed.

There was something of that despair over the town of Paris. There was not in France one body apparently that was ready to take up vigorously and to organise the immediate necessities of the national defence. The government to whom that duty fell were a group of men embedded in a violent quarrel with the capital, afraid that at any moment an abortive insurrection like that of the 10th of March might turn into a massacre like that of the previous September. The one man that had in him the power of organisation and the conquering energy to effect the transformation that was needed, Danton, was for the moment at the ban. He had re-

turned from Belgium as the apologist of Dumouriez, never doubting of his loyalty, determined to preserve the only soldier left to the country; he had but barely escaped from the storm of the 1st of April when the treason of Dumouriez was known in Paris. It seemed to overwhelm him.

It was a feature peculiar to the Revolution even in these moments of paralysis that, until its whole work was done, unsuspected springs of energy were never wanting to it; it had the power of resurrection. There lay always beneath the alternate frigidity and chaos of its public a national force which could not but express itself somewhere, now through the Commune, now through the Parliament, now through a crowd. It is this permanent gift of self-creation which has done most to lend to the Revolution in the eyes of the French its legend of the fatal and the superhuman.

In this April, when the Commune had nothing to suggest, when the crowds had abandoned the streets, when Paris was deserted, and the Parliament hopelessly divided, it was out of that divided Parliament that the life-giving thing was to come. And it is typical of the impersonal forces which drove these men in spite of themselves that the two statesmen who on the 5th and 6th of April created the Committee of Public Safety came from opposing sides: each a member of violent parties which one would have thought interlocked and merely wrestling, and made useless by the violence of their struggle. It was Isnard, the full Girondin, that proposed; it was Danton that, by his support, carried the proposition to form the great committee, and when it was formed, France had been given a centre, an organ of national will, that, in changing forms, was to lead at last twelve hundred thousand men past the frontiers and on into the capitals of the kings.

It is astonishing how little Robespierre either said or

did in the short two months that created this dictatorship upon the ruins and anarchy following Louis' execution. He proposes nothing, he does nothing; even his standing quarrel with the Girondins is carried on with less pertinacity and in a kind of bewilderment. He does not know himself; and, untrue as the criticism was when it was made, he gives support to the accusation of Condorcet that the approach of danger rendered him silent. With the making of the Committee of Public Safety he had nothing whatsoever to do. The hammering out of the new weapon, the value of the debate, passed him by and seemed meaningless to him, as the action of a sculptor would pass by a man wholly ignorant of the arts; yet this newly created thing in whose making he had done nothing was to be the principal instrument of his final domination. Once it was made he watched it, pressed upon it, at last entered it, and with the despotic power it gave its members, abusing somewhat the public illusion as to his domination of it, it was as a member of the Committee of Public Safety that, a year after, he pretended to rule France.

The vote was taken and a little body of nine men, debating in secret, linked closely by common labours, alone instructed upon the whole situation of the country, began to change and canalise the course of the revolutionary flood. Why was that date the origin of a new thing; the gate of the Terror, and, for that matter, of the victories? Because the moment the Committee was formed it was inevitable that power should concentrate in its hands, and in developing my thesis of the false position which Robespierre came to occupy in the State I must describe the nature of this despotism whose advent I have called inevitable.

When a country is by tradition centralised, that is, when it has got rid of class government, when the connection between the citizen and government works directly

along known channels, whose direction is defined not by custom but by law and which converge to one source of authority, it is evident that whatever name you give to the chiefs of the bureaucracy, those chiefs will be the trustees of Government. Centralisation demands too vast an army of officials and too strict a discipline to permit of indirect pressure by the rich upon this or that part of the machine. It is highly representative, its personnel is drawn from every class, it protects public interests: but it is absolute. You may surround the institution with careful safeguards, you may have (as you have in modern France) a social spirit which puts that great machine into the hands of unambitious, devoted, and similar men; or it may happen, as it has happened once or twice in the military crises of the nation, that genius and creative power seize upon it, making its mastery more evident, more picturesque, and for the moment more useful. But whatever it is that holds the threads at the centre, that thing, passively or actively governs France.

An Englishman will understand this foreign condition more easily if he considers the vaguer forces that determine the fortunes of his own country. Make certain that a spirit is leavening the public schools, or that some philosophy has captured the universities; appreciate the tone in which the rich talk of the new rich whom they have to assimilate; hear the decisions of the few men who control our press, and you have arrived at a knowledge of what turn the whole Empire will take.

To leave this metaphor, which might prove a source less of conviction than of irritation, and to return to the nature of the Government without which the French would feel they had lost their civilisation, consider in what necessity the Committee of Public Safety arose. For more than six months France had been in the hands of the feeblest of governments. Until the fall of the

monarchy there was, however much we talk about the King's being a prisoner or about the licence of the Jacobins, a definite governing power in the Tuileries, which power gave its orders to the whole machinery of France; indeed it was because that power was so definite—controlled the armies, appointed the administration—and because it was so palpably opposed to the national spirit that an armed attack had to be made upon it. What could not be abolished by a vote had to fall on the issue of a battle. When it was gone, and after the short interlude of vigour which Danton presided, and whose name is Valmy, the armies indeed continued to protect France from invasion, but the hold of the Government over the nation was failing. The Constitution of '91 was designed for a time of peace. Liberal, almost American in its provision for local autonomy, it gave no machinery for the binding of the fasces of the nation, or for sending it in a mass against the enemy. Moreover, the energy of the Girondins was taken up in an incessant defence against the great capital that surrounded and would oppress the majority of the Parliament. The ministry of Roland was unable to command its generals, to levy its taxes, to compel the enlistment of reinforcements; the result had been the breakdown of March.

Perhaps the best evidence of the anarchy of the situation was the state of mind in which men had lived through the 9th and 10th of that month. Would Paris rise? Would there be a massacre? Of whom? That all these questions had been asked was sufficient proof that as there was no government to enforce the levies and munitions, so there was no power strong enough to prevent a repetition of September.

Now in April with the formation of the two engines of the Terror, the Revolutionary Tribunal and the Committee of Public Safety, this anarchy ended. The Terror was not an anarchy, it was a despotism; the appreciation

of that truth is the appreciation of the latter revolution. It was more than a despotism—it was a military dictatorship. For two months the nine men who had been given such ample powers had passing through their hands the nomination of all officers, the reports of all spies and agents, the accounts of all the arsenals and depots, the establishment of all the munitions of war. They were supposed only to survey and to check; they very quickly became the only possible government. For it was they that saw with the clearest vision the extreme peril of the nation, and it was known that they alone could appreciate the situation of France. So rapidly did their power grow, in these two months, that I would even go so far as to call them the authors of the weakening of the Parliament; they thought it a last resource for the strengthening of the nation. For it seems to me that the report of the 29th of May, in which the committee sifted and exposed the breakdown of the national forces, was the trumpet-call which led to the mutilation of the Convention three days later. I would fix the room where Danton and his colleagues sat organising the beginning of the national defence, and take it as the point of view from which the distorted accident of the insurrection of the 2nd of June falls into perspective.

Side by side with that hidden but fundamental power, trailed on the last quarrels of Paris and the Gironde. The Gironde, seven days[1] after the formation of the committee, sent Marat before the Revolutionary Tribunal. The Revolutionary Tribunal was Parisian, and acquitted Marat.

On the 15th, Pache, the Mayor of Paris, read at the bar of the Convention a demand on the part of the Commons for the removal of twenty-two Girondin

[1] 13th of April, by 220 to 92. But over a hundred members of the Radical Left were away on mission to the armies.

deputies; on the 18th the Commune declared itself insurrectionary—that is, no longer responsible to the National Parliament, but taking order and counsel as it chose. A month the two forces faced each other. Then, with the close of May, with the coming in of the warm season and the flowering of '93, the Gironde that had made such a stout battle for legality fell.

It was on the 17th of May that the Commune united its armed force, chose a general for it, and prepared for action. The Gironde countered (still meeting arms with laws) by naming, next day, a committee of twelve that should report upon the illegalities committed by the town. The committee reported openly that the Commune was conspiring against the whole system of national representation, it demanded an increased guard for the Parliament, and it arrested Herbert—which was like arresting the Commune in the flesh. On the 25th Isnard, from the chair, rose before a mass of petitionaries (who were still demanding the dismissal or abstention of the twenty-two), and cried with doom in his deep voice: "If the national representation be touched, I tell you in the name of all France that men will soon be looking along the banks of the river to find if Paris had ever stood by the Seine."

Nothing after this could save the integrity of the Parliament. The Commune, from a common and furious enemy, became an enemy specially menaced and insulted; within a week it had broken its opponent.

The story of that day of revolt, though Robespierre himself appeared in it so little, merits the telling, for it was the victory of his party.

Disaster upon disaster, the victorious march of the Vendeans, the besieging of Valenciennes (the last fortress), culminated in the explosion at Lyons and the massacre of the Jacobins in that town; the news of this reached Paris on the morning that the Convention was attacked.

Already, three days before, mobs had moved against it, had broken its doors, had mixed with the Assembly, voting with them in a farcical turmoil, and crying out against the insult offered to the city by the Government's action in arresting Herbert. The irregular committee at the Evêché had, partly by threats, partly by ruse, produced an apparent unanimity among the sections. A chance soldier that had never yet been a soldier, Hanriot,[1] was at the head of 120 cannon, and led the few hundreds of armed men that appeared in the court of the Carrousel on the morning of the 2nd of June.

There was a long comedy played before the Parliament accepted its humiliation. Hérault de Sechelles, the Speaker, proposed to go out and meet and parley with the enemy; thirty members of the Mountain sat unmoved upon his left, and saw defile before them the uncertain hundreds of the Convention. They knew that a capitulation could be the only end. In the Carrousel, under the sunlight, Hanriot at the head of the troops reiterated the plain demand of the extremists of the city for the destruction of the Gironde: "You have no orders to give. Hand over to the people the victims they have demanded."

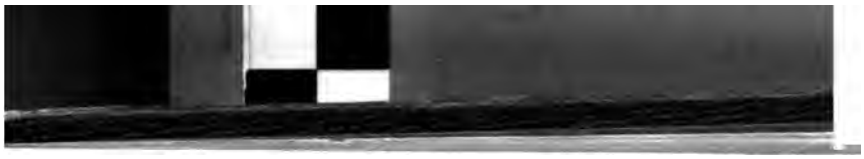
The Convention did not immediately return to debate upon its own humiliation. It passed through the centre of the palace to the terrace overlooking the garden, as though to find help from the National Guard that were massed in the distance, and whose doubtful attitude might, had there been sufficient determination in the Parliament, have been converted into a defence of that body. They re-entered the theatre to find it invaded by the crowd in arms, and then necessity compelled them

[1] An irregular appointment, purely popular. Hanriot was one of the few leaders of the Revolution that had no pretension to birth or letters. He had been first a servant, then a player in village fairs. He was a drunkard, and very courageous.

to the self-destruction from which they never raised themselves till the fall of Robespierre.

With the populace sitting on the benches beside them (even voting), with the President suggesting names to be added or cancelled, the Committee of Twelve was broken and the twenty-two deputies that the Commune had continually demanded were voted under arrest. Some had already been willing to resign; others, like Lanjuinais the Breton (a man proud of his memories), had inflexibly remained at their post, defining themselves as members and limbs of the People, part of the sovereign, an indivisible portion of the general rule. Others had fled. But every suggestion to mitigate the full evil of that day had been made and had failed. Danton had proposed himself a hostage; the Commune had even been willing to offer as security for the lives of the members that were expelled a similar number of their own leaders. And this also should be remarked, that though the Gironde was sacrificed, no one dared go beyond the proposition that they should remain under arrest in their own houses.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the mitigations which surrounded the fate of the Gironde at that moment, it was evident that the Parliament had consented to pass under a yoke. It did many great things after that; it saved the unity of the nation; it may be said to have led the army in the person of its deputies on mission. It established a hundred of the national institutions, especially the great schools; it registered that constitution which was never put in force, but which surely marks the most complete scheme of democracy. It was the Convention that made modern France, and Napoleon did nothing save defend and organise its work; but in spite of all this it lived for a year in servitude. The Committee, and side by side with the Committee, first the Herbertists, then the Terror, and at last in a fashion Robespierre, ruled it.





With the 2nd of June once more Robespierre increased, as, by a kind of fatality, he increased regularly with every great day of the Revolution.

The arrest of the Girondins and the evident failure of the Convention, was so profitable to the Jacobins, and therefore to Robespierre, that he is regarded with too general a consent as in some part its author. It was so evidently the close of his two years' battle with the Rolands, and seemed so complete a revenge for the insults of the preceding autumn that many see him planning it. That is a misreading of history. Robespierre, through the whole of April and May, continued his speeches upon the most abstract matters. Every time indeed that Paris growled at the remaining power of the Gironde, Robespierre at once took up her complaint and urged their retirement. He was ready to be the organ of the Jacobins in insisting upon the paralysis that the twenty-two laid upon the country, and he was especially himself when he argued against Danton's attempt to conciliate them. But he did not go to the Evêché, he gave no orders, and he could furnish no suggestion save that of "a moral insurrection" against men who had for months resisted the open threat of massacre.

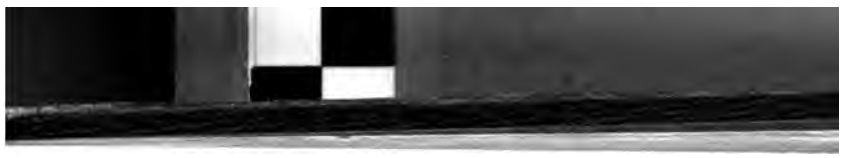
It was the Committee that permitted or made the 2nd of June; the Committee was already the executive, stronger even than the Commune. And this the whole character of the day proves.

The insurrection had in it something unreal; Paris did not really move. Robespierre the younger said more than he meant when he marvelled at "a hundred thousand under arms and no blood spilt." The supreme folly of the Gironde and of their futile Twelve in sending Marat to the Revolutionary Tribunal and to triumphant acquittal, their blindness in arresting Herbert for an attack upon their party in the Père Duchesne, would not in itself have done the work. In this great city of

three-quarters of a million souls, of 200,000 men, it may be doubted if 5000 met in the sections on the night that determined the insurrection against the Parliament. But Paris inert had agreed with Paris active. The Committee also saw that France under the Gironde lay open; it could not forbear to save the country in spite of the law.

It may be asked in what way the fall of the Gironde left Robespierre higher than it found him. It was by leaving to the Jacobins the initiative in pure politics. The great Committee would order the armies and the arrests, but upon all the general legislation of the moment it was the club of the Rue St. Honoré that led the debates and framed the laws. From that date it dictated them to the Parliament. Now Robespierre was the head of the club, its chief exponent; and the ramifications which the society sent out throughout France met in his hands or were known to lie under his central influence. This it is which explains the innumerable letters and appeals which begin from that moment to accumulate in the house of Duplay; he was the moral head of an organisation that held the country by a thousand local threads. Separate from and superior to that organisation had stood the authority of the Parliament, and when, with the elimination of the twenty-two, the Parliament sank, the Jacobins assumed control of all save the executive of the Revolution. They drafted the new fundamental laws, they rehearsed the debates of the Convention, they became the arena.

An example of the change may be found in Robespierre's "Declaration of the Rights of Man." It had been nothing but an academic essay a few weeks before; he had made no attempt to turn it into a bill, it had delighted the Jacobins as a literary rather than a political effort; but after the 2nd of June, when the new constitution was discussed, this essay became a code.





And there was that other force always helping Robespierre: helping him now. Paris took for her permanent ensign a name which had been mixed longest with hers, the name of the man who had led in phrases her attack upon the Gironde, the name which the Gironde itself had consented to regard as that of its principal enemy. And hence Robespierre becomes, as it were, the title of unity; the head under which men looked for the resistance to Federalism, and the consistent landmark to which the Republic turned in the fierce defence of that unity which it made during the ensuing year.

And he on his side began to watch with more keenness the growth of his popularity from the immense to the universal. He gave himself a master, consented to attune everything he did to this public reputation, and served almost abjectly his own hunger for a popular name. It is characteristic of him here, as in his whole career, that he hesitated before action; rather permitted action to be thrust upon him. The pressure was irresistible. On the eve of the insurrection his two friends, his forerunners, St. Just and Couthon, entered the Committee of Public Safety.[1] He himself for seven weeks more sat watching from without, receiving the reports from their lips, and ready when the door was quite opened to him, to enter.

It is of interest to note the manner in which the pressure was exercised. Throughout the month of June he debates, criticises, judges the new constitution, which was to have been put in force with the cessation of the war. That constitution was an instrument of the gravest importance. It was taken to be the final pact between the nation and the Revolution, to be the final work of democracy. There has been raised against it the complaint that it was drawn up in a few days as a momentous expedient in order to appease the anger of the

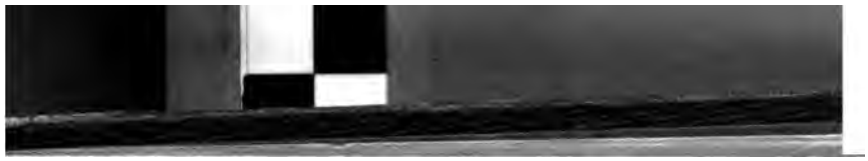
[1] Added with three others to the original nine on May 30.

departments whose members had been expelled and who were already arming to attack Paris: this opinion has thrown it into some contempt and neglect, but it is false. This constitution, which, if it be examined, will be found to be as complete a model of democracy as that of any of the western states of America, was the labour of over six months in committee, it was but the last forms and half a score of additional clauses that were the result of the crisis, and even these were nothing new in character; they were only the reiteration of principles already determined, but with regard to which the revolt of Normandy, of Lyons, of Bordeaux, necessitated a more emphatic declaration.

During these debates Robespierre took on an attitude of censor which no one withstood, and which was witness to the accession of power the fall of the Gironde had brought him. He was not in opposition; on the contrary, the Constitution was so full of his own spirit, of the Jacobin essay, that he had no motive to do anything but applaud—his daily speech with its daily reservations, doubts, and revisions (often just and clear-sighted) was but the more evidently an advertisement. He opposed just so much as a man may who has no purpose in opposing at all, and by that action betrayed his motive. The whole was judicial, calm, and pedantic in the true Jacobin tradition.

Did Rouffron suggest that the inviolability of representatives was a danger? Robespierre defended that inviolability with every circumstance of careful reasoning and deference to Rouffron's age: called him "le digne veillard," and strung out at immense length all the arguments in favour of immunity with which the constitutional lawyers of this country had provided the Revolution.

Did the Committee suggest that the electors of every commune could be called together at any time by the





demand of a certain number among them? Robespierre gave his reasons for fixed dates alone being retained, and when there was a feeling in the committee in favour of "arbiters"—chance judges chosen by the parties to settle commercial disputes — Robespierre demanded regular magistrates; and the spring of all these preachings, petty amendments and essays was his determination to press upon the Committee; to establish his mastery by reiteration.

The time was propitious. There was but one man that could have been to him at that moment, not an adversary indeed, but a rival, and Danton a man of wide view and therefore with no following, a man who was so bent upon the danger, the civil war and the invasion as to be consumed with action, was failing. The great fatigues were falling upon him with the full summer, and he let drop out of his hand the lever of government which he had now twice grasped—in the August of the past year and now in this April—a man so evidently made to govern that every one was glad when he consented to command. Not only was he failing in political activity, turned inward upon himself, dragged back by the memories of his wife, and (full of her last advice) preparing a second marriage, but he had also in him a distaste for political speeches. Robespierre, "whom his congregation asks to speak and who speaks continuously," filled up and occupied all the scene. In a time which still had a passion for hearing its dogmas asserted, re-asserted, developed, declaimed; before an audience that by the accident of the Jacobin organisation held the nation, and that was just so near to mediocrity as to demand sermons, he held his pulpit and professed. In the vigorous and exaggerated phrase of Michelet, "Danton looked at the perpetual movement and tremor of those jaws and felt that they were eating him up."

The result was certain. On the 10th of July the

Committee—that is, Danton—resigned; in a fortnight the new Committee was named and Robespierre was a member of it.

This was the result which Robespierre's watching for all this while, his pressing upon the doors of government by a combination of insistence and vigilance, his monotony, his popularity and his repeatedly verified suspicions, had drawn from the Parliament. By a curious fatality the date of his entry into the Committee was exactly a year to a day before the moment that threw him from power.

There is very little truth in his contention that he entered with reluctance upon the responsibilities of power. He was proposed by a man fully in his confidence, thoroughly his friend; a man who a few days before and a few days later, was to appear as his principal supporter in the affair of Custine. He entered it as the only member who would under the circumstances be supported by at least two other members, satellites, Couthon and St. Just; what was called with some exaggeration, the Triumvirate.

Nevertheless, when he said that he was reluctant to take office in the circumstances of the Terror (and under the immediate memory of the death of Marat), it was not a hypocritical speech; it was the expression of something that certainly always lay in his mind—the desire to be free to criticise, to exercise a sovereignty wholly moral, and the instinct that his power lay in opposition. He was indeed able for a year to build up the foundations of positive action, but his very fibre told him the whole time that such an effort on the part of such a man as he, could not finally succeed.

I have said that Danton, wearied, already ill, oppressed by the fears and feverish heat which were mixed up with the growing Terror, had slipped from government. He had used this great instrument of the arbitrary Committee which covered all France with a buckler, en-

forced unity and fed the armies, doing its work as pitilessly as a conqueror or as the devastations of nature. It was in his character, its great energies and its necessities for repose, to let drop almost at the moment of its creation the levers of the thing he had made. His heart was troubled. The imprisoned Girondins, with whom he had partly lived, and between whom and the Mountain he twice offered to throw a bridge, haunted him. The increasing momentum of the Terror, escaping control and becoming a frenzy, terrified him; it was the first thing he had yet come upon in his powerful life of which he felt himself unable to be a master; nor does anything bewilder and weaken men of strong simplicity more than the presence of a force stronger and simpler than themselves. To this impression of weakness and of despair his fever and his sickness added. He lapsed from government, to speak only once or twice, with the same principles, but with a failing voice, at last to take refuge in his home and in the country sides. When he reappeared it was to curb, if possible, if not to fall in curbing, the storm which he had himself let loose.

Robespierre replacing him at such a moment (for the popular voice counted enormously even in the Committee, and even the Committee demanded some head) was a man by nature opposed to the Terror, but so much colder and self-concentrated than Danton that, for the sake of success, he would permit it. Throughout June and July it became evident that a man who would appear to govern must yield to the crisis. Danton fled from it; Robespierre, being much less of a man, was content to yield.

The enemy advanced almost without a check; Valenciennes, long besieged, was on the point of falling; a week after the expulsion of the Gironde, the Vendean revolt had reached the Loire, Saumur had been taken, and the Girondins fanned the furnace. The members who were detained in their houses escaped if they chose from the

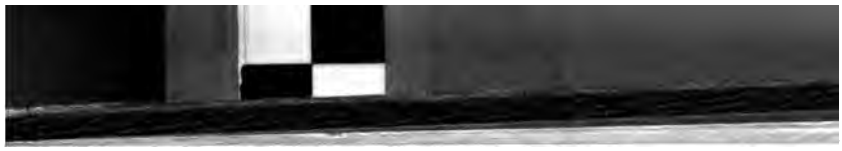
single gendarme that guarded each of them; those who remained, remained only through pride. Pétion,[1] Barbaroux, Guadet, Buzot, and the rest, left Paris at their opportunity. They aroused the civil war.

The Cotentin, which is the garden of the north, remained faithful, but Calvados rose; the town of Caen issued a manifesto directly federal, menacing Paris, and it armed a battalion to march on the capital. The Eure, even Evreux, asleep in its hollow, was awakened; Buzot called up yet another battalion there, and they took the road to Paris. Vendée was for the King, Central Normandy for the pure Republic of the Girondins, but they were each opposed to the "monsters"—the legend of the anarchy in Paris; and who could tell that they would not join hands? They were but three long marches one from the other.

On the 24th of June Amar demanded on the part of the lower committee, who were the police, that the Girondins remaining should be taken from their nominal arrest and imprisoned. On the 8th of July St. Just presented the report which has been unjustly accused of severity, and which should rather be judged by its principal phrase. "If you punish these men, remember that you may not punish opinion. Outlaw those who have fled, for they are rebels, but try none of those that remain on the score of politics." On the same day Condorcet, violent and embittered as were all his well-bred clique against the Mountain, and who had published a violent attack on the Montagnarde constitution, was impeached, and fled.

Wimpfen, from the army of the north, had already said that he would "obey the Convention and return to

[1] Pétion's flight is typical of the laxity with which the Girondins were guarded, and of the lightness of their arrest. He went out to dine with a friend. The policeman told off to watch him went down to eat in the kitchen, and Pétion walked out of the door. In ten days he had raised Normandy.





Paris, but at the head of 60,000 men." All June and July were a challenge, and at the moment that Robespierre entered the committee the violence of the "mad dogs," the "enragés,' was coming as surely as the breaking of thunder, or the tension of an unnatural day in our northern summers. Valenciennes, Condé, Mayence had gone; Cæsar's Camp (as they called it) within a hundred miles of Paris, had surrendered. The French in Frankfort had been butchered. For the men that followed Herbert, for the extreme men that will in all times of revolution preach revolt and that think to find liberty in the negation of law, it was a moment of opportunity, or (as they doubtless thought it) of providential freedom. They began their clamour for mere vengeance; the fury of '93 seized them, and if from some further place their souls can remember Europe, they can still boast that they created a wild moment in which no restraint stood between man instinctive and his complete licence.

How was that tyranny permitted? The government a secret thing, hidden in the Committee, the government which Danton would have made open and the proof of whose existent unity was perhaps not evident until Carnot had joined the great committee, might, had it been clearly a master, have prevented the sudden wind of death that arose as Mediterranean winds blow from Africa: the sirocco that made hotter the hot month of July and with August and with the first days of September was to blast the nation.

It was not only the danger in which France found herself, it was much more the impossibility of driving the mad energy of the moment into useful channels that pushed things on to their extreme. On either side it was the individual that was killing, and there was nothing to restrain the individual. In Normandy the members of the Gironde who had escaped, inflamed one individual soul, the soul of a woman, poor and noble

and silent; she came up to Paris and she killed Marat.[1] In Lyons it was the individual, the noble or the priest, that organised an immediate revolt and killed Chalier. In Paris the effect of this was still revenge and individual passion. It was Herbert, peculiarly himself, hardly representing a community, that pushed on the Terror. It was more the terror of opinion and of readiness for evil than of acts.[2] It was a terror which oppressed the mind and prepared it for the madness of the autumn, rather than a terror of the revolutionary tribunal; but under the pressure of it and for the moment Robespierre sank, afraid that were he to oppose it he would be opposing something corporate and would be throwing to the winds the popularity which, as he thought, already gave him the aspect of complete power.

On this account he would not discover his personal action until the end of that violent moment of preparation. When he did appear at the end of September it was with a certain moderation, but never with that control which a wider man would have dared: a control that might have saved the Gironde, and that in the height of the winter might have admitted the "committee of clemency."

I will attempt to put myself in the shoes of this man who, when the fatal violence of '93 rose up in eruption, was permitted, and I think was willing, to take the helm. He was unworthy of it and perhaps knew himself unworthy. He yielded to the pressure, but his pedantry had this virtue attached to it, that it permitted

[1] On Marat's death Robespierre could find no phrase but this: "I am myself marked out for daggers."

[2] The statistics of the revolutionary tribunal will show what I mean. France had been fighting the world since January, yet of death sentences there were but 9 in April, 9 in May, 28 in June (of which 20 were for one plot), 11 in July (including Charlotte Corday and the 7 conspirators of Orleans), 5 in August, 19 in September. It is an extraordinarily meagre list.

him to be cold and to show his disdain. Roux the wild priest he broke;[1] later in August the same spirit, this time erroneous, led him to refuse Danton's proposal—the sheer necessity of the time—that the committee (which he himself swore never to re-enter) should be recognised as the only government. But while the Terror was thus distasteful to him, and while he kept up his formula even to the refusal of a necessary dictatorship for the committee, he had not the general view that would have permitted him to organise the awful power of what had become a despotism, to turn it against the enemies only of the Revolution and to repress, as by his morals he desired to repress, the gross licence which boiled up with every week of the advancing summer.

If one might express a longing with regard to deeds past and sins inexpiable, the longing would be that two things might have happened together: that the Revolt, Lyons, Marseilles, Toulon, Vendée, Brittany, Normandy might have fallen suddenly (as they would have fallen before modern armies and before a modern rapidity of communication), and that the genius of Danton had not been so mixed with clay nor so mortal: had survived the stress of the time and been able before the autumn to follow up the domestic victories and to organise the full force of the Republic against the invader.

These things were not permitted. The extreme peril of the Revolution endured too long; August and September were full of it. The liberty we enjoy was defended as in a fortress and encircled upon every side. It was thought about to perish and the thought maddened.[2] You could not go a clear hundred miles

[1] Roux had said, "Yours is no democracy because you permit riches." It was partly by Danton's act but still more by Robespierre's that he was struck off the list of the Cordeliers.

[2] Here is an example of the madness. Therasson proposed that the deliberations of the Committee of Public Safety should be *Public!* It was with the greatest difficulty that Robespierre got the proposition rejected.

from Paris without finding its enemy marching forward and victorious. That situation gave the Herbertists the reins of opinion, and all the autumn, half the winter became an orgy. Robespierre had not the power to resist; he submitted, and the spirit he hated, the spirit he might in a greater mood have resisted, branded him. He loved to be called the government. Before the spring he was called the Terror.

There was much beside his ambition that conspired, as it were, against his natural fortune. To be master by the moral authority of the Jacobins was to hold in one's hands the hauls of the great web that covered the towns of France; when such a man entered the Committee of Public Safety he was thought as a matter of course to be master of that also. Then what was he? Did he not hold the whole power? Pressed by the worst of licence, for the moment an unwilling slave of Herbert and his madmen he was yet—if he was to call himself the master—bound to go with that flood. More than this. At the very moment when a general levy was decreed he was elected, for the first time, President of the Convention.[1] It was with him in the chair that the news of the capitulation of Marseilles was heard, that the petition of Bordeaux for mercy was accorded, that Normandy admitted the failure of her revolt. But it was also during his presidency that worse news came: that Toulon admitted the English fleet,[2] and that the strength of the resistance of Lyons was endangering the Republic.

He yielded. The Herbertists demanded, and redemanded the blood of the Girondists;[3] he permitted their trial to proceed. With the entry of the wildest ideas

[1] August 23. He was also at the time President of the Jacobins.

[2] 28th of August.

[3] I have no space to quote them. Let those who wish to follow the fury read the 24th number of the *Père Duchesne*.

into the State at bay and in the delirium of a close siege, with the proclamation of the republican calendar and the beginning of the six months' struggle with Christianity the Terror became real, weighed on all France, and began the useless marvel of blood that ended with Thermidor.

It does not concern this book to describe the end of those great men whose fall was also the first heavy wound of the Republic.

What is to be said of the man whom legend has made responsible for their blood and for that of so many others? Certainly he did not cause it to flow; almost as certainly he could have checked the disaster. But he was absorbed and contained by the fear of something general, the fear of the corporate power of Paris, or, as he called it, the People, from which his reputation proceeded, and of whose lips he had become the servant.

It was (like all his appreciations of things general and living) an error. It was not the people that demanded the blood of the Girondins: it was a small, intense and violent faction that had the name of the people always upon its lips, that passed for the people because it was in the tradition of the popular vengeance and of the great mob violence of the past years. He did not oppose. He excused in platitudes, and that is all that can be said of his position towards the Gironde in its last hour.

Save this: that at the moment when the Terror was turning from a political method to a fanaticism he developed—it is a thing his closer students might think incredible in the light of his past—yet he did develop a kind of firmness utterly different from his mere tenacity. He had always been direct; for two years, since the beginning of a quarrel with the Gironde, he had been acid; but now, whatever it was in him that had produced directness, and latterly a sympathy of expression, was

lifted to the power of assault, and a personal managing of things. He desired, with a vague prevision of '94, to show that he could kill or save.

There are two occasions within ten days of each other which very well illustrate this change: the great debate of the 25th September, and his action upon the 3rd October.

In the first the effect of new victories was weighing upon the Assembly, and when Briez appeared before it, excusing the fall of Valenciennes, the Parliament had acquired a certain hardness of temper which Robespierre reflected. Briez said plainly, "I did my best; I saw death from quite near by, and at least I preserved for the nation an important garrison." There were many answers to the pathetic apology, one only was stiffened into epigram, and that was Robespierre's: "Are you dead?" He had been in Valenciennes; the town had surrendered; he came back alive.

A slight illness that had affected Robespierre a week before, returned after the effort of that debate, and he did not reappear till the day when there was question of killing the Gironde, yet on this second occasion also he showed a certain strength and mastery.

The benches were half empty; Amar,[1] rising to read his report against the Gironde, spoke to a house of which he knew well that the majority even among its diminished numbers desired to be absent. He asked them to vote that the doors should be closed, and that no one should leave the house till a decision had been taken; then he read out in sentences that swept like a scythe the condemnation of the whole party of the moderates. A movement began (it originated from a private member) for sending before the revolutionary

[1] Amar has so little to do with this book that I fear his extraordinary personality has been neglected in it. He will reappear in Thermidor. Let this anecdote suffice. He chose the month before the abolition of all titles of nobility to purchase one at a considerable expense.

tribunal not only the twenty-two of the Gironde, but the seventy-three who had in June signed a protest against their exclusion. That motion was of a kind which, in the height of the Terror, it was almost impossible to resist; from what motive it was that Robespierre alone resisted it, it would be difficult to say. It may have been the tortuous sense of justice which never deserted him; it may have been a panic lest the Convention should wholly destroy itself in these passions and leave the Republic empty; but I would be more inclined to believe that it was a new determination to be daring. He wished to try himself in power, to ride the Assembly, to set himself as a firm obstacle against "the madmen," to begin leading for once rather than be led by Paris, and in general, to have the inner satisfaction that he had come to a place where he (that had always imposed his principles) could at last impose also his decisions upon the details of policy.

Just as the Convention was abandoning itself to one of those unhappy floods in which lassitude mixed with partisanship could drive them into the worst of their excesses and abandonments, just as a fatal division would have been taken, Robespierre spoke.

The deputies were already streaming to the bar to vote that the division should be taken on the roll-call of the names, and that the friends of the Gironde, if any remained, should be marked in such a manner.

He rose and refused to support Billaud Varenne in his motion for that roll-call; a motion that underlined the Terror, and that would have left each man to stand for ever before history as the judge or the accomplice of the Gironde. He said:—

"I do not see the necessity of regarding the national Convention as divided into two classes—that which is the friend of the people, and that which is made up of conspirators and traitors. We have no right to decide

suddenly that we have to deal with any other conspirators than those that are named in the report. Let us take the original decree upon its merits, and vote purely and simply upon that."

And he made a second and much more important interruption in the debate. It was proposed to include with the Gironde in the same decree of accusation the seventy-three who had protested against the 2nd of June. He opposed. "I speak in the face of the people, and speak frankly. I will be judged only by my conscience. You must, even at this hour, distinguish between opinions and acts." The Herbertists and the Left began to murmur. He continued: "Citizens, be sure of this. You have no ultimate defenders save those who dare to speak in the moments when something seems to impose silence."

He went on, speaking of "the faction," trailing out a peroration, but he had saved the Right from a general execution.

In this moment which, though the violent men that drove the storm could not know it, was the doom of their effort, a spirit that was not wholly human disturbed the nights with tragedy; the Terror boiled, and men approached the limits where despair and vision meet. It was the last clutch of the great wrestling, the moment of tottering before the throw. The mind of Paris lost hold of the ground; Dalua, the oldest of the gods, the spirit of Celtic madness, took a part in this strain of the western fortunes, vengeance and darkness entered in with him also. Twisted into the same whirlwind, all the heroisms and the first victories appeared.

The empty head of Orléans fell; but that same day Dubois Crancé broke into Lyons at the tail of an artillery

duel, and spared the place like a soldier:[1] a whole army was set free for the frontiers.

A week later a kind of Sabbat led the Queen, very haggard and proud, to the guillotine;[2] but Cholet was preparing—Cholet, the great fight in which the Republic fought and fought, not noticing the hours, till at last it broke the Vendeans.

In the hour that the Queen died Wattignies was won. All the day before, the centre had charged uselessly against the Austrian cannon, the right had been broken by the Hungarian cavalry and had lost its guns. The day seemed so lost to the Republic that Coburg did not call upon the Duke of York and the English for reinforcement; but on the morrow, the 16th of October, a mist that a lyric has called the "Destiny of France" came down upon the plain. Carnot, tall and hard, dragged off the young recruits to the right, appeared on the plateau and, when the fog lifted at midday, took the last earthworks at the bayonet, himself leading, losing half his men, and opening the blockade of the frontier. Then he put off the uniform in which he had raised the blood of the boys behind him, and posted home sombrely to Paris in his long grey civilian coat, to tell the Convention coldly that the new order was saved, but to make no mention of his charge. All the week was breathless. Naples to her ruin declared war, the last of the coalition. The non-juring priests were outlawed.

It was in the agony and bewilderment of such success following upon such a crisis (Paris had lain awake to hear the issue of the struggle) that the Gironde went to

[1] He found his own cousin there, commanding the rebels, and permitted a number of evasions. Read in this connection the vivid memoirs of Mlle. d'Ercherolles, which have recently been very well translated into English, there you will hear of how this mousquetaire shaved in a great silver bowl, chosen out of the loot, and laughed, and granted largess.

[2] By far the best impression of her is David's thumb-nail sketch, taken as she went by in the cart.

the guillotine; and opened the way downwards for all the revolutionaries. They at the approach of death were possessed with a spirit of feasting and a call from the sunlight came up northward to them and glorified their end.

It was already the time of the vintage. The vineyards by the great river and on the hills that bound it like low walls were full of men and made a moving tapestry under the mild pleasure of their autumn. At this season a secret working runs through all wine, and something that is more generous than content gives praises for the summer past and rests from creation with the silent plenitude of energy. The vine prepares life, and supports it against the season of darkness and cold. This link of the summer ended and the mists beginning, a viaticum for winter, was for these men in Paris a viaticum before the long time death. These clear souls, chained in the north, received the influence, and the passing of the Gironde was ennobled by the dignity and certitude that accompany enthusiastic calm. It was as though the rainy gloom of those last days in Paris had been lit from somewhere by the soft sky of October where it protects the garden of the Pyrenees.

On the last day of the month they sang their song together, and Vergniaud that had best loved freedom died the last, still inspired by grave music. So the Republic narrowed, but whatever narrows, rages upon itself, and ends.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE TEMPTATION OF ROBESPIERRE

WHAT is it in the story of this man's soul that turns the eye inward and forbids the appreciation of realities? It is as though in the mere writing of him some subtle sympathy proceeded from a spirit so long silent and drew one into its own void and vagueness, where his one stuff, his firm and isolated conviction, hung rare and alone.

Time and again it has seemed in the nature of this book to call up the armies, or at least to fill its pages with the creative noise of Paris; time and again the persistent monotone that enspelled the tribune of the Jacobins has cut off as with a curtain the outer sound of the Revolution from my mind. His innumerable chosen phrases, his reams of blue paper, close-written and erased, have been fine threads cramping my hand, and I have lost the description of an experiment so vast and terrible that a pen recording it should properly turn without effort to reproduce its majesty. But Robespierre preaching Robespierre, the one political right insisting for ever on the one political right, has cast over the sublime accidents of those four years a curious and unnatural hush, and has dominated all the colours with a screen of something colourless. So divers cannot hear the waves for the singing in their ears.

The period of which I am about to treat in this chapter emphasises more than all that went before it the strange contrast between Robespierre's life within and the outer clamour that frames him. I am about to treat of

the crisis and agony of the Revolution; of the five months that open with the execution of the Queen and close with that of Danton; of the passage from the sunlight to the sunlight, from the last leaves to the spring again, in which darkness the Revolution ran out beyond itself and insisted upon a path that could only lead to the abyss—yet in that wild drive Robespierre's whole history is concerned with an interior thing, and, writing of it, I am confined to but one intense episode of morals; a vivid sin, remote from which, uncertain and ill-defined, pass shadows, faint echoes, phantasms of action. The angry victories at the Bayonet, the strange new months and days, the great persecution of the Church, the aggravation of the Terror, the giant's wrestle with rebellion, the frenzy of the reprisals, the silent despotism of the Committee—of itself a full subject for a book—all these must go by almost unheeded that there may be told in a few pages what passed in an empty space of thought. And this glaring and teeming passage of our immediate past must be abandoned for the single crisis of one solitary mind.

Of what nature was that crisis? It was the transition of Robespierre from the self-deception and gradual ambition which had risen in him throughout the past two years to the definite acceptation of the new position which he was to hold for so brief a time in '94. He who had never governed one individual, at last attempted to govern, or rather to pass as the chief power in, the nation.

Was that determination fully conscious? Yes; with this qualification, that it was intimately mixed up with that illusion by which all of us read our own personalities into our conception of abstract right. He would have told you that he wished, as a tribune rather than as a leader, to make a right world, but in practice that wish became a necessity to rule.

Now ruling and the power of one man were opposed

to all that had made him: to the sublime theory of which he had been so jejune, but so sincere, persistent, and faithful an exponent. Therefore, when he passed the boundary that lay between his old complaints, suspicions, and love of praise, and his new plan of supremacy, he abandoned his very self. That abandonment was to force him to two great disasters or crimes. First, he hesitated —till it was too late—to join those who had risen with Danton to stop the Terror; secondly, he was compelled, as a consequence of this political intrigue, to give up Danton to the political necessities of the Committee. Essentially a man innocent, or incapable, of intrigue, this last betrayal should have seemed a crime to him; essentially a man of few and clear principles, and abhorring arbitrary power, his temporising with the Terror (which was in its nature martial law) was a direct negation of his own theory of political justice. It is the method and consequence of his double fall that I have to develop in what follows.

The Girondins were dead.

The scene upon which the Republic entered when it had sealed its mysteries with such a sacrifice was one whose motive and prime force was the unnecessary continuance of a state of siege in spite of, and on into the beginnings of military success: it was the momentum of the Terror. But the Terror, thus continued, grew prodigiously, and it is this charge beyond which lends to the awful passage of that winter its dissociation from human experience, its dark experiments, its furious assolutions. Here men broke apart from their closest political bonds, from the sense of things, and from themselves. It lay with Robespierre's own decision to follow or to resist the swirl. Had he joined the moderates, as they themselves believed he would join them, the Republic would have endured.

It is a truth not easily appreciated, yet one which determines all the end of his life, and which I therefore would set forth fully, that he accepted at this moment, by I know not what miscalculation of social forces, the side that could not endure, and abandoned the reaction toward simplicity and normal law which should have been the special function of his rule. At the head of the Convention and the club, passing for the master of the Committee, the primary weakness in him appeared as it had never appeared during all the years of opposition and criticism. He did not know how men were governed, nor had he ever understood what are the correctives to violence; he accepted all that the real powers (Carnot, Prieur, the lower committee, certain representatives on mission) might demand, so only he could still think himself an infallible head of the democracy.

I know that he may be taken as yielding only to an irresistible thing: there is an atmosphere of excess in '93 that seems to overwhelm and excuse the revolutionaries. How many men chiefly responsible for that time lived on into the Restoration, silent, respected, even provincial; how many protest with justice in their memoirs that even the worst of the Terror was a thing driven by necessity.

Look over France and you see nothing but a cavalry charge in which time is eaten up by fury, as a field passes like a river and is eaten up under the hoofs of straining horses. The 2nd of June is already very old, the Monarchy (a year dead, not a year buried) is forgotten—or only remembered for chance vengeance—it is so passed that these executions, the Queen, Bailly, the Dubarry, each utterly separate from the other, mark out sporadically (the first diplomatic, the second a popular revenge, the third a show), the last shots of the Crown's pursuers. The monarchy is so utterly passed that it has become an incomprehensible legend. Its true quality is already so forgotten that republicans accusing one

another drag up the charge of "royalism" like a meaningless epithet, a conventional abuse. France driving at the most extreme realisation of the Revolution, cutting off her past, living and dead together, accepting a new calendar of Reason, forgetting in her tempest religion and the link of history, and even the divisions of time, seems something upon which we cannot reason: a storm or a wild music. Seen as a drifting thing on such a tide you may make of Robespierre in the autumn of '93 a toy of forces so superior to himself that the analysis of his motives becomes indifferent. But from within his own soul things had another aspect.

Look at the centre of that mind and you will perceive one dominant act: a great refusal; the self-desertion that broke its self-reliance, the last compromise between his ambition and his faith. This abandonment crumbled the small central pillar upon which, had he but known it, all his power reposed. It was as a man of debate, wary, minute—but especially definite and inflexible—that his rise had been permitted. That epithet of "incorruptible," in which plutocratic societies and their historians can now find nothing but the comic, had in it at that time something of the sublime. In the quiet times of decadence, in the times of the merchants and the years that prepare defeats and shame, it is something to remain unmoved by the opportunities of wealth: in the times of crisis and of revolution it touches upon the heroic to maintain with a ceaseless activity, however monotonous, the road to an exact and certain goal.

I have spoken of the first breach which was made in that wall of his; his alliance with Paris. A year before, in the autumn of '92, he had accepted Paris, and in accepting the spokesmanship of that city he had fallen from his first position, he had ceased to be the single exponent of the creed. But that initial corruption which

he suffered just after the fall of the monarchy was not final, nor was it irretrievable; it was a first but not a complete abandonment of '89. I have said that it was in part the product of ambition, but it was not yet wholly that, and Robespierre bitterly defending himself against the Gironde could always plead honestly that he remembered the Gironde reactionary, based upon a limited suffrage, mixed up through Brissot with intrigue, perhaps (he was sincere in thinking it) with the Court, certainly with the shifty politics of Dumouriez. He could plead before the tribunal of his own conscience that France until the death of the King was in two camps, and that a man did service only by joining a party discipline. He could plead that he was senior member for Paris, and that Paris alone had the light, that the provinces were largely led by reaction and did not know the peril in which the future of the Revolution stood.

When the King's head had fallen, and when the executive broke down in the hands of visionaries he could still hold himself in the main consistent, and if he demanded the dismissal of the moderates he could say, "In theory I still hold for the pure Republic. When peace is restored I will maintain the sanctity of the national representation—but the times are not normal; unless something is done we shall have the enemy in the capital with the summer." This kind of defence had now broken down.

A crime is the matter of a moment, but the self-deception that often leads up to crime is a process. That process I have shown him suffering in the summer of '93. He had been, as it were, compelled to accept the great opportunity of the 2nd of June, he had been called to power. He had not been unwilling. The two friends, St. Just and Couthon, had held open for him the doors of the Committee and had mounted guard for him in the Hall of the Two Pillars. By a kind of

gravitation he had passed the door and had entered the Committee at the close of July.

He had obtained an increasing jurisdiction at the expense of an increasing trouble of the mind. He knew that he was becoming something mixed, somewhat larger, but much lower than, the little Robespierre that had been an anchor to the Revolution for four years. Men odious to him, the Herbertists, the men of dirt and of mere passion, had pressed upon France all August, and he had submitted—in order that there should be no rift in the unanimity that supported him. The blood and the clamour for blood that in the drowsy heats had sickened and broken down the great nature of Danton, had been endured by this less generous and drier mind.

But he had been troubled. He had saved the seventy-three. He had not rejoiced but had rather drawn back into himself at the death of Vergniaud and his companions. Still he did not move for fear that, moving, he should lose his place. He gave up all initiative, save those spasmodic movements of which the most famous is the 3rd of October, because initiative and originality endanger a spokesman. There is no doubt that ambition began to possess him altogether, and that he had subjected and harnessed to his ambition all the strict logic that was his only principle of vitality. Even the great news of Wattignies that had been for the nation a song of deliverance, turned in him to a political opportunity, a lucky chance permitting him to affirm himself and to escape the risk of "moderatism" that he had run in the month before.

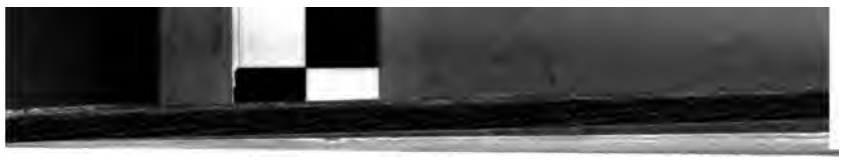
He hardened. But the soul of a man, however adust, has still something of the organic, and when the organic turns rigid it is dying; it grows brittle and can be broken to pieces.

This is why I have called his entry into the winter

and his policy during those five months to the spring—Brumaire, Frimaire, Nivose, Pluviose, Ventose and on into Germinal — his temptation. There was still constantly open to him the road to return. He would by an alliance with Danton have been able at one moment to stop the Terror and to let France slip back into the normal. Paris was certainly ready, the provinces would have followed. But he saw his nominal supremacy endangered, he felt near him like guards the Committee, able to expose him at any moment and to show that they were the true master. He feared for his reputation of authority, and he did not dare. By yielding to that direct temptation, by choosing something against his permanent self, he was led on to '94, and, in spite of his recent protests in the Committee he became the outer title of the Committee's policy. He was led on to the sacrifice of Danton, of Desmoulins his friend, of poor Lucille, the wife of Desmoulins; Lucille, whose letter he was compelled to treat as a proof of conspiracy, the hostess of so many evenings.

As nearly as such strict minds can, he approached hypocrisy; and since things good and evil carry in themselves salvation and damnation, this great refusal fell back upon him to his hurt. He that had been the symbol of the Revolution found himself the symbol of a rigour that grew from pitilessness to fury; it did him no service to attack it silently from within; outwardly he was still the later, useless Terror, and as the later, useless Terror he fell; finding that whoever permits is an author; that God demands confession open and full recantations.

This is the tragedy which I have to follow to the close of this book. It is not only a private tragedy; it is the catastrophe of the Revolution, because the man who suffered it was not only a man, but also such a symbol of equality that, for all his paucity of in-





vention and action, no republican can utterly deny him the title of great.

When the Girondins suffered, the shock of the axe trembled through France; it was felt at Arcis and aroused Danton. Danton returned. But there is something in these puissant natures which lends itself not only to the creative activities, but also to the after effects, of fever. Men who have ridden in a regiment know what it is after nights of bivouac by low rivers in the autumn meadows to find the reins trembling in their hands when they mount before morning, to lose grip with their knees and to fear disasters. They take an obstacle uneasily, and they blunder in their orders. Some such accident of nerve had fallen upon the Champenois. He came back, still a giant, still forcing a loud note, but within uncertain, losing opportunities and coming too late and too gradually into the advance. He was determined to stop the Terror, but the action of his determination grew and formed itself slowly—had his nature permitted it he might have sounded a charge that would have dragged Robespierre in with the mêlée of the moderates, have persuaded him (who saw nothing largely) that general power was on this new side.

In capturing Robespierre Danton would have caught in with him the whole movement and force of which Robespierre was the accredited chief. The Jacobins would have been divided, the Committee would have split, its majority would have appealed to the Convention. The Commune certainly would have risen or attempted to rise in defence of the guillotine, but Danton and his policy would have won. For certainly the majority of the committee would not have dared to call up a battalion, and certainly Paris, the sections, the guns, would not have followed the Commune or Herbert.[1] The

[1] This statement needs no such proof as could be drawn from research. The enormous sale of the *Vieux Cordelier* when that pamphlet was issued

moral authority of the Convention, mutilated and silent as it was, yet was the one thing which stood. To the Convention everything was referred, and by it alone, legally, would anything be ratified. It would have been galvanised into life by such a return of the national vigour as Danton—the Danton of '92—might at once have inspired and expressed.

Had Danton struck at once on his return, this tide would, I say, have set so strongly as to drag Robespierre in with it, the Terror would have ceased before January. As it was, Danton waited a month, and Robespierre had time to hesitate and to fall into his false rôle.

The execution of the Girondins fell on the 31st of October; Madame Roland had been guillotined on the 8th of November; on the 10th her husband had stabbed himself by the roadside in Normandy. Danton did not come back till the 18th of November; his first speech in the Convention was not heard till the 26th,[1] and it did not deal with the Terror.

Desmoulins, whom Danton had sent out to do the work, but who was also half the inspiration of it, did not put his pen to the famous pamphlets that shook the system of the Terror till the 3rd of December, and this, the first number of the *Vieux Cordelier*, did not appear till the 5th. By that time for six weeks the Committee had been preparing, had pressed round Robespierre who sat in its midst: had made him feel that the full powers of the Dictatorship were still necessary to them. But the Committee were not yet enemies of his. The Committee did not plot or plan such a pressure; it was an inevitable result of the nature of their organisation.

More than this, he had seen St. Just, his right hand, plunge fully into the policy of coercion — St.

with the object of stopping the Terror and the difficulty which the great Committee (in a country trained to centralised government) found in suppressing the movement are alone ample evidence.

[1] *Moniteur*, 8th Frimaire.

Just, become by an accident partly a worker, knowing the armies, a drafter of reports, would not have followed the return to clemency; Robespierre would have been alone with Couthon.

Nevertheless, in spite of all these reasons for hesitation, his continued balance between the policy of pity and that of the Committee's despotism, his ultimate decision, and his abandonment of the Dantonists, afford an abundant material for the study of the man.

Danton returned at the moment when Robespierre was supporting the only part of the moderate programme in which he felt that his leadership would retain complete security, and that part, moreover, of which he had become, by his consistent action through four years, a kind of protector: he was defending the Church.

Brumaire—all early November—had been a riot of Herbertism. It was suited to the breakdown of all reality that the Commune should imagine that the roots of Catholicism had withered. Chaumette, Clootz, Mormoro the printer, from his cave in the Rue de la Harpe, passed up and down the city like raving missionaries "unpriesting." They pruned the old tree. It was at this moment that the nullity of the schismatic church appeared, and that, with a sincerity which perhaps saved their souls, such priests as had clung for livelihood or by routine to a faith they had never held, came in confessing an emptiness of the mind. Gobel was easily persuaded. He resigned his bishopric, and came into the Convention, with half his clergy and all the Commune at his back, to renounce his orders. The movement, passing very rapidly, and falling in three months into nothingness, ran throughout the new dioceses.

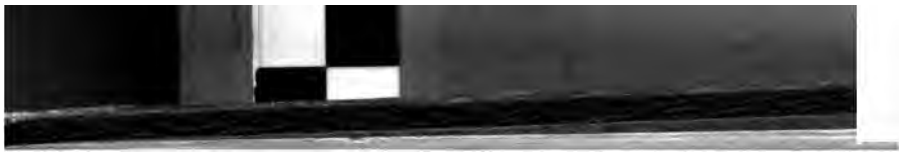
Of all the instances take these two. Parens, the vicar of Boississe le Bertrand, near Melun, wrote to the Convention on November 7 (17th Brumaire) a letter: "Here are my papers. I am, or have been, a priest—

that is to say, a charlatan." Also, he asked for a small pension. "Because," said the Rabelaisian, "a man who can only chant *oremus* has no way of earning his livelihood" (*Moniteur*, 17th Brumaire). Again, the yet more thorough ecclesiastic who suddenly appeared before a session of the Commune, abjured and begged that "in the roll of citizens they would change his name from that of Erasmus, which it had hitherto been, to that of Apostate."

The sacred vessels were brought before the Parliament in mascarades, there was pillage in more than one church, the saturnalia reappeared. The vestments, I believe, of Dubois found a fitting place upon the back of an ass, and his mitre was put on the beast's head—a last expiation of the regency. On the 20th Brumaire[1] was held in Notre Dame the feast that may or may not have been called that of the Goddess of Reason. The Commune, with very partial success, ordered the church doors throughout the city to be closed. Ten days later, on the 1st of Frimaire, Herbert, in the Jacobins, demanded the last extremities — the execution of the seventy-three, the sacrifice of Madame Elizabeth. "The extermination of the Capets." It was plain that the wave which had risen up against all religion was dragging anarchy in its wake.

This crisis affords the first landmark in the rapid progress of Robespierre towards the reputation of supreme power. He caught Herbertism just at the top flight of its extravagance, and stood out as the Arrestor, the moderator of the Revolution. That the great Committee was the true author of Herbert's fall there can be no doubt. They had determined on the Terror as a practical instrument, a military necessity, they would not let it turn into a weapon for the extremists, nor let its authority slip from their hands into that of Herbert and

[1] 10th November.





his friends. Yet, though the committee determined the breaking of Herbert, the opportunity was singularly fitted to make Robespierre appear as though he was acting alone. The whole matter was bound up with religion, and religion had been Robespierre's department, as it were, for two years. Herbertism was inspired by a hatred of Christianity; Robespierre, by that faint inheritance of it which had produced the *Vicaire Savoyard.* For more than a year he had been the only hope of that great body of citizens who hesitated, troubled, between their new republicanism and their memories of the Church. Up to the close of his life he was destined to express, and to depend upon, his benevolent neutrality towards Catholicism.

His speech on this occasion, which began the destruction of one party of his rivals, is often quoted to show the texture of his mind. It is from beginning to end a defence, as nearly passionate as his manner permitted, of the idea of God; the last rhetoric of the Deism of Rousseau. He exclaimed in one of those clear insights from which his pedantry did not wholly debar him:—

"Atheism is of its nature oligarchic . . . when the conception of God comes to be attacked, the attack will not proceed from the popular instinct, but from the rich and the privileged."

It was a prophecy of our own time.

The attack on religion, which had been the triumph of the Commune of '93, marked also the highest point of its power; it had aroused in those who had hitherto remained indifferent a prodigious hostility, it had prepared reaction. And the Committee — that is, the workers of the Committee, the majority—grew afraid.

The Committee determined to attack Herbert and the old commune not as extremists, but as undisciplined men, and as men likely to provoke by their madness a return to milder things. They feared reaction.

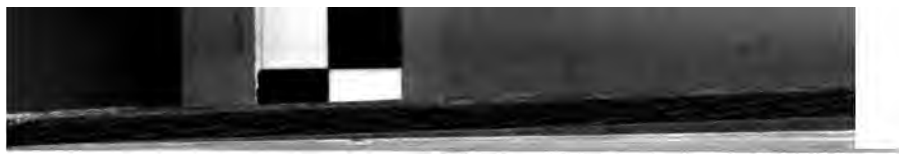
For Carnot, a reaction at this moment meant the

stoppage of the convoys, the lack of munitions, the failure of recruits; he needed the Terror. For Couthon (not in the committee but, as it were, a department of the government in himself—Finance) it meant the disappearance of the currency, the total collapse of the depreciated assignats, the bankruptcy of the nation in the midst of the wars; he needed the Terror. Jean-Bon St. André needed it to man his ships and to provision and to build them; St. Just to drive his armies; Prieur to enforce his plans. This need for the Terror was not yet actively expressed, but the committee were watching for the first cries against severity, and Robespierre, who hesitated and desired clemency, who in standing an obstacle to the Herbertian faction and in defending religion had seemed to prepare the return to pity—Robespierre sat among his colleagues and knew how little of a master he was in that room. He felt their eyes on him and he did not go where he would.

Then came a few hard winter weeks, during which the Committee organised their plan against Herbert and the Commune of Paris. Robespierre knew that in surrounding this insurrectionary they had no thought of checking the Terror. He admitted their mastery and was willing to continue the Terror.

The lively art of Desmoulins, the sense of Danton had not divined this. Both these men, the greater and the lesser, were determined to arrest the persecution and to relieve the State. It was time. The opposition to Herbert which Robespierre had so conspicuously led encouraged them. They believed themselves to have some favour with the Committee. They thought themselves certain of Maximilian. It is to this day a matter of doubt whether he did not himself inspire the first of Desmoulin's pamphlets.[1] It was on the 15th Frimaire, the 5th of December, that the first number of

[1] He admits having seen the proof-sheets, and we may presume that he actually corrected them.





the *Vieux Cordelier* appeared; on the 10th the second, on the 15th the more famous third. Desmoulins hammered into what he believed to be the rifted stuff of the Terror the phrases of Tacitus like wedges. It was not only the terrible irony of his pen nor the climax of his genius spurred on to its highest just on the edge of his doom; it was also the return of humanity that lent his efforts so much power.

Desenne's shop became the centre of whatever was read and debated. The *Vieux Cordelier* was caught up from the presses by crowds that filled the streets, it passed by thousands into all hands; became a common cry throughout the capital.

Women ran through the hall of the Convention demanding the liberation of their sons, and Camille's whole programme seemed to have gained the city: a "Committee of Clemency" was demanded. Everything prepared the reaction: all that Christmas was a noël of victories. It was known in one week that the Republic was saved; in one week between Christmas Eve and the New Year Paris heard of the Vendeans crushed at Savenay, of the forcing of the lines of Wissembourg, of Landau relieved, of the enemy passing back home over the Rhine.

Desmoulins in the first four numbers of his pamphlet had taken for granted that Robespierre would defend the same cause. On the 7th of January, however, something had passed in the Committee. What it was will never be known, but Robespierre appearing at the Jacobins disclaimed the cause of pity. All his new power compelled him to the retractation; he remembered how the generals turned to him,[1] behind the back of the

[1] There is to be seen at the archives a curious little pocket-book, in the first seventeen pages of which Robespierre has made his private notes on policy. Among these one may find that he had down the names of the generals, his proposal for their disposition, and his judgment upon their

Committee; how it was to him that the smallest private appeals were directed.

Let me retrace the last steps that led Robespierre to this desertion.

Just upon Christmas he had promised a "Committee of Justice" which might have been made—and which he probably intended to make—into a court of revision for the gradual liberation of the prisoners. Camille had written the fourth number of the *Vieux Cordelier* as an appeal by name to Robespierre.

"My Robespierre, I call you here by your name, for I remember the moment when Pitt had you alone left to withstand his coalition, and when but for you the ship would have perished: the Republic was passing into chaos. . . . Oh! my old college friend, remember that there is something more durable in love than in this fear, and clemency (Tertullian tells it us) is like a ladder of falsehoods, but reaches to heaven. You came very close to that idea when you spoke of a Committee of Justice . . . but why should the word 'Pity' have become a crime in the Republic?"

On that same day, the 21st of December,[1] at the Jacobins Nicholas the public printer had cried out to Camille, "Camille, you seem very close to the guillotine,"[2] and Camille had answered gaily, "Nicholas, you seem

appeals, as though he were himself concerned with the department of war. Here are his judgments on the generals Dumas, Marceau, Hoche. And it was his brother who had just found out the genius of Bonaparte at Toulon.

[1] And on the same day (the coincidence is grotesque enough to merit a record) the Convention after a long and stormy debate decided that the habit of speaking with the hat on was disrespectful. "It has grown too common of late," said Robespierre, and when there was cited the example of the Quakers he replied with some justice, "Quakers are usually exceptions that prove a rule."

[2] There is a discussion whether Robespierre put up Nicholas to warn Camille. There is no proof but a tradition to that effect. Nicholas was indeed Robespierre's man, but on the other hand Robespierre would never have put the thing so bluntly.

very close to making a fortune. It is but a year since that you made your dinner off a baked apple, and here you are printer to the State." It was the first pass of the duel that opened between the indulgents and the extremists, a duel in which, by the spring, each had perished, leaving the Committee supreme.

On the 7th of January, then, the 18th Nivose, the growing irritation against Camille broke out openly in the club. The opportunity coincided with Robespierre's recantation. It was known that the silent royalist faction which lay under the city, a minority ready to strike, had raised its head at the appearance of the *Vieux Cordelier*. Apart from the Herbertist group that Desmoulins aimed at, apart from the men whom he called by name and cut and wounded with his style, the common republicans fell into an ill-ease and were alarmed. Robespierre had determined to follow the Committee, but he remembered his friend. He attempted compromise. Desmoulins was not in the mood for it; he could see that Robespierre was tempted to abandon him, but he thought he had enough hold to prevent it. Some days before he had offered to burn his No. 3—he had offered it in a rhetorical manner.

"You complain of the third Number? I can understand it: I have given orders that it shall not be reprinted. I will even burn it publicly, *so that you promise to read my No. 5.*"

This Robespierre took up at the Jacobins, and seeing Desmoulins in front of him, looking him straight in the eyes and with the slight perpetual smile upon his lips, he excused him; apologised for him to the club.

"There is no need to expel Camille. We will burn his pamphlet."

Robespierre, a man incapable of repartee, had laid open his guard, and Camille could not resist the advantage. He laughed out after his opening stutter.

"Burning is not a convincing reply."

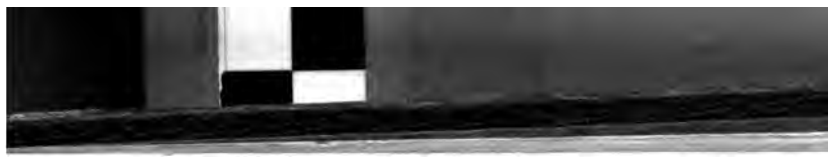
It was Rousseau's own answer to the public burning of his "Emile." Robespierre, whose whole life it was to play the part of Rousseau in power, heard, as it were, his own self laughing at him in Desmoulins' reply. His smile left him, and he abandoned the last thread of the alliance with the indulgents.

The Terror began to surround Desmoulins. The final withdrawal of Robespierre left him to the warnings of anxious friends. Once, in his house at evening, they hesitated at his courage and begged him to retire a little that audacious skirmishing line of pamphlets. Lucille, gracious, unrestrained, and wayward, put her hand upon an objector's mouth and said, "Let him save the country in his own way. Whoever dissuades him shall have none of my chocolate." They had something in them both of children. Fate took them in the spring, and they died within a very few days one of the other; the lives also of both these lovers accused Robespierre when he came to die.

I have held throughout this book that Robespierre was never really master; nevertheless, it must be admitted that in this moment of January, after the 12th, when he had broken with Desmoulins, when Billaud-Varennes had publicly threatened Danton in the Convention,[1] when St. Just, summoned back from the armies, had reinforced him with a supreme energy, Robespierre might have thought himself a master; the pressure of the committee upon him was underground; it was easy to persuade himself.

I might waste pages in the analysis of that tortuous process whereby a man convinces his own mind till it adopts an attitude beyond its powers. It is enough for me to describe him as one now permitted to speak for

[1] "Woe to the man that defends Fabre d'Eglantine!"





the government, one that kept that position only by a constant attention to every gust that blew from the right or the left, one whom all consulted, implored or execrated as though he had been the true author of the Terror, and one who consented to be so flattered and to pass for France.

He was lying in wait for the spring-time: then—the victories having made a full security, his rivals having disappeared—he would come in and save the nation from the Terror, he would abandon the Committee: he would impose his perfect Republic and he would write on the first page of a new constitution the name of God and the nature of his simple worship.

This imagination of his was the more emphasised by the coincidence of his private view and of that of the Committee in the matter of the "madmen": the Herbertists. These men were the special obstacles to his theory. Their looseness, their blind and negative revolt, their very persons were repulsive to his ideal. In the disasters of the summer, when the extreme part of the nation gave them an arm, they had imposed themselves somewhat upon his government; the Committee had been compelled to follow them. But he had watched and dogged them with that ceaseless attention and readiness that was his unfailing method; with them, as with Brissot, as with the Constitutionals of the early Revolution he had followed the tactics of yielding and disappearing, gathering into himself such strength as he had, and when a breathing space was given suddenly exercising that strength. This kind of action which was as much a part of his nature as his reserved gestures and his power of ceaseless, similar writing, conquered once more and for the last time.

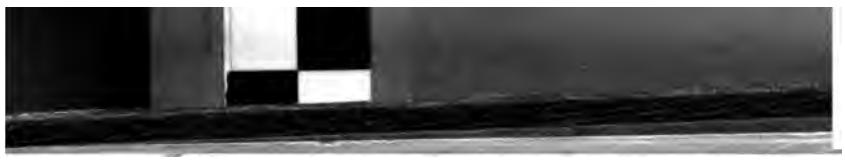
I have shown how he took advantage of and gripped the Herbertists in the anti-religious crusade. How he threw them. In that effort he had received, from the

side of Danton, the unexpected aid of Desmoulins. He had used it. He pressed the extremists (whom he thought to be ruining the State) so close that they became hunted men. He caused Carrier to be recalled from Nantes. He posed as the sanctuary between the vengeance of the Republicans and the Vendeans. He was actually the saviour of those moderate or silent men whom the hysteria of Carrier at Nantes would have thrust into a common holocaust with the insurgents against whom those very moderates had heroically defended the city.[1]

There was a month of hesitation during which no step was taken. The Committee still called for the continuance of the Terror, Desmoulins, now thrust wholly back upon Danton, continued to call for clemency; behind the movement, though he spoke so little, it was known that the great voice of Danton himself gave orders to the staff of the indulgents and demanded the return to peace. In his drawing-room of the Cour du Commerce, below the rooms of Lucille and Camille, was held almost daily the council of war that might succeed in opening the prisons.

I will not deny that Robespierre feared this also and for twenty reasons. He feared that the Committee of Clemency, if it originated too early or from any brain save his own, would destroy his leadership. He feared something creative, passionate, and immediate in the character of Danton, which would have swamped such a man as he, had it received strength to come out again into the arena. He was angry at the open opposition of "No. 5" of the *Vieux Cordelier*, at the frank Dantonism of "No. 6," which seemed to say to the

[1] In my own family there is clear proof of this, for my great-grandfather, a firm republican, was thrown into prison by Carrier. His wife, desiring to save him, thought at once of Robespierre. She travelled to Paris, caused a note to be delivered to him, and her husband was saved.





populace, "Forget Robespierre and forget the government. You are the General Will and you have but to demand the end of the Terror." He was angry because his great mystery, his puppet-show of a special police had been almost exposed by the attack on Héron,[1] but still, his principal care for the moment was the destruction of the extreme Left, and he succeeded.

On the 4th of March (14th Ventose) Carrier, the maddest of the Avengers, being returned from his massacres and drownings at Nantes, destituted of power, confined to his club of the Cordeliers, and pacing and raging in idleness like a cheetah caged, the Left (which thought itself the Commune and even the city, but was in truth only a group of men) attempted a wholly insufficient revolt. The Cordeliers met. They ordered crape to be veiled over the Declaration of the Rights of Man, "Until the people should have recovered their rights by the destruction of the faction." The "faction" meant not only Danton and clemency, it meant also Robespierre and his policy of restraining the proconsuls in the provinces. Carrier himself spoke like a Bacchanal using mere symbols. "I mean by the faction the men who calumniate the guillotine." Herbert still full of his private quarrel, of the check Robespierre had inflicted on him

[1] Here there is some hesitation in judgment. So many contemporaries lived to remember what they called "the dictatorship of Robespierre," and insisted with such unanimity (when Michelet questioned them) that Héron was the "Black Friar" of the revolutionary leader, that both Michelet and history have accepted it as a fact. This much of the legend is true: Robespierre did exercise (through a system of reporters, agents and clerks that centred in Héron), a powerful pressure upon the police system and even upon the lower committee. Nevertheless I maintain the opinion which I have no space to develop that he had no real power. Individuals appealed to him because he had become a legend, and by this system of agents and of intrigues he could often do a great deal for individuals, but on the great lines of national policy, power certainly lay with the majority of the great Committee. It is impossible to notice the vacillation of Robespierre in the matter of the *Vieux Cordelier* and of the policy of moderation without being convinced of the truth of this view.

in the autumn, of the reversal which Robespierre more than any other had forced upon his policy of unchristianising France, remembering the way that Robespierre had hesitated and seemed to inspire Desmoulins in the beginning of his career—Herbert, who saw in all this the end of the revolutionary effort and a kind of treason, the giving up of the keys, put the thing squarely.

"When I talk of the faction," he called out across the vaults of the hall of the Cordeliers, "I mean those who saved the seventy-three in October."

They proceeded to a farcical insurrection. The want that had been chronic in Paris from two years before '89, and that lasted on till the organisation of a new society (the Revolution, in fact) produced the modern wealth of France—that famine they thought their ally. It betrayed them. The populace ascribed the lack of food to the Herbertists themselves, to the ravages of the revolutionary armies, and to that way of theirs by which they went on raging for impossible extremes, as though men needed neither food nor repose.

The frost and silence of the last of winter condemned these men. No section was in their favour; a certain number of sections denounced them by name. In the night of the 13th of March they were arrested; after a trial that was a mere sentence upon such wild pleas as revolutions alone imagine, they were condemned, and executed on the 24th of March. With Herbert, Clootz, and their companions ended the faction of the extremists. The "revolutionary army" (gangs terrorising the home departments) was disbanded, and there was nothing more heard of the policy of mere vengeance. The Commune ceased even to pretend that it was Paris. It became (the committee allowed such toys) the machine of Robespierre. All the power of the Left had vanished. There still remained the moderates, the Right.

With the fall of Herbert it might be thought that the calm was beginning. Robespierre had destroyed that side of the battle which he was known to have disfavoured. It seemed natural that he should lead their opponents, the moderates, to victory.

There passed, upon the contrary, a scene that finally proves the hollowness of his domination.

He had been attacked for a month by such an illness as had already, four or five times since the gathering of the States-General, kept him apart from the debates. Mention of it would be of no moment did it not prove a point which should never be forgotten in his career. In his silence (he was absent from the Committee, from the Convention, and from the Jacobins for forty days) the Terror increased. It was not his presence nor his initiative that moved it. He had left his room to receive as good news from the Committee the fall of Herbert. Immediately afterwards he was asked in his turn for the Dantonists.

It was the moment in which Robespierre was most tenacious of his popular leadership, parading it.[1] The demand for the heads of the Indulgents was not made by the workers only. St. Just, who made the whole business his, whose speech destroyed the men of the *Vieux Cordelier*, demanded it. Hérault de Séchelles (Danton's chief friend, and destined to die with him) had already been dismissed from the committee and arrested—it is probable that every member except Robespierre and Lindet approved of the demand. Lindet, head of the commissariat, refused bluntly to sign. "I am here to feed the people, not to kill patriots."

What Robespierre said or did will never be known. This much can be conjectured, that he protested, hesi-

[1] There is even a question whether he did not at this moment offer the command of Paris to Buonaparte in the place of Hanriot, whom the moderates were attacking as they had attacked Herbert.

tated—then yielded; and, having yielded, went the full length of his fall, consented to help in every way, and despatched a business that troubled him like a crime, burying it away under the earth, as though with Danton's body Danton's murder could also decay.

On the very night before the two committees met to decide upon what proved to be the assassination of the Republic, Humbert, that had been Robespierre's host in the Rue Sanitonge during his first two years in Paris, asked him to dine. Danton was there. They sat together, Robespierre silent and troubled, Danton reviving to the rough gaiety of '92. He attempted, with an advance that was brusque but courageous, to launch a political discussion, and, turning to Robespierre, he asked why there were still so many victims.

"Royalists and conspirators I can understand; but those who are innocent?"

Robespierre answered with a false phrase—

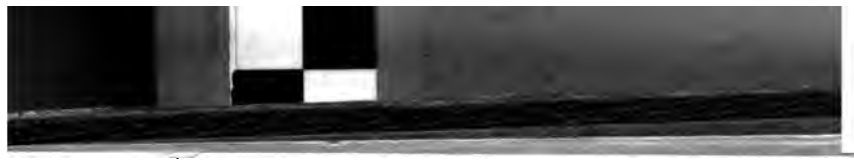
"And who says that any innocent man has perished?"

He plunged back into an uneasy silence: waited a moment, then rose and abruptly disappeared.

Next day he took upon himself the weight of this friend's blood when he consented to the demand of the Committee.

I repeat, he consented. He certainly did not propose; as certainly, I would maintain, he attempted at first to ward off the blow from the indulgents, but he dared not try a fall with the Committee.

Upon what is such a conviction based? In the strict spirit of modern analysis it is difficult to reply. Robespierre furnished the notes upon which St. Just made the report that silenced the Convention. They still exist in an English collection: they are hurried, disjointed. When the Convention hesitated, it was he who spoke most determinedly against hearing Danton and Desmoulins at the bar, who called such procedure "privilege," and





who, perhaps, sealed the fate of his colleague. Upon the surface—if the Committee of Public Safety be taken as certain and united, and if only what appears be considered—he was among the first, even the leader, of those who determined the sudden arrest on the night of the 31st of March.

Nevertheless he did not lead, he yielded. The proofs of it are wholly moral, but they are convincing. Consider that he had not yet, and did not in moments far more perilous, sacrifice any one to his mere ambition. That ambition tempted and at last ruined him, is the argument of this chapter; that he exercised it pitilessly, or made it a permanent and conscious motive is what not only the few salient facts presented in this book, but every one of the thousand documents and anecdotes remaining combine to deny. In so far as such ambitions have something in them glorious, he was quite lacking in that sense of glory; in so far as they have in them something careless of principle and violent, every portrait of him, every recollection of him, omits such a feature. His hardness was all of logic; his ambition was a thing coming after success, overlying and corrupting, but never entering the close fibre of this man.

Moreover, Danton was not then his danger. Perhaps in the past June, perhaps even in the crisis of December, he might have been afraid of a continuous rivalry. But in March? Danton and his friends had been uncertain or silent for over a month. They had rejoiced indeed at the fall of Herbert, but they had been the object of no public adulation nor of any public appeal since December. There was but one thing that Danton menaced—the Terror. The destruction of Herbert, which (after his revolt) the Committee thought a necessity, made that menace more formidable. After such an example Danton had but to speak (so it seemed) and the descent towards peace would begin. But Robespierre was not concerned to

defend the Terror. On the contrary he had been, if anything, its opponent. At its cessation he would have received an added popularity, and he was therefore aiming at such a cessation.

There are two further arguments, which appear so light that I hesitate to bring them forward; but they are so convincing to those who go right into the documents and the atmosphere of '94 that it would be a pity to omit them—they are, first the exclamation of Billaud-Varrennes four months later, secondly the character of the notes used by St. Just in his indictment of the Indulgents.

It is a matter to which I will return in its place, and which I bring forward here for but a moment. On the day that Robespierre fell, in Thermidor, Billaud-Varrennes was one of his most violent accusers. He was a man of defiant and straightforward language, bull-necked, violent, immoderate in gesture. There came from his extreme anger a rush of words that were neither calculated nor suited to the occasion; there were absent, therefore, all the elements of a pre-constituted plan. Well, in that harangue the first thing he remembered was Robespierre attempting to defend Danton in the committee. Consider that we have no records of what passed within those walls where the Ten sat judging France. The memoirs of the men who survived are necessarily excuses, and are often contradictory. Barrère, the fullest of them, is also the least trustworthy, and I take that attitude of Billaud's, in Thermidor, to be a piece of sudden passion, a cherished accusation worth all the later testimony, even if that testimony accused Robespierre (which it does not) of having procured the arrest of the Indulgents.

As to the notes given to St. Just, I fear it is impossible, without a reproduction of them and a comparison of them with Robespierre's other writings, to convince my readers of their quality. Nervous, hurried, discon-

nected, they are unique in the mass of documents that Robespierre left behind him. There is not present in them that choice of words which is hardly ever missing even in his most casual writings. There are one or two erasures, but they are not the result of thought and fastidiousness (as were commonly his second phrases), they are the result of mere haste. He has written a word that would be useless, meaningless, or illegible, and he substitutes, in almost equal haste, another. That is the testimony of the writing. It has every mark of a document demanded at a moment's notice by his friend, and drafted in the hour before he spoke.

For, his vote once given in the Committee, he persevered as men persevere in a monstrous evil. After such a vote, Danton saved would be Danton an enemy, and Danton an enemy following the very path of popular clemency that Robespierre intended to follow. Such a Danton would have meant the end of the Committee, the end of that ideal of a half-religious, half-political dominion which Robespierre thought now to be in his grasp, and with which he desired "to make this nation the refuge of the oppressed and the terror of oppressors."

He gave his vote, and fell into the fatal groove which that beginning made for him; he was to race down it, through the aggravation of the Terror, to his own death, and was to hear in the agony of Thermidor the name of Danton striking him down like a spear.

I have described elsewhere the trial, the condemnation and the death of the Indulgents. Here I am concerned only with the man who had permitted this sacrifice, and who shut himself in alone throughout that morning and refused himself to all.

Hidden in his room over the narrow yard whence the conquerors had run out to see the tumbrils go by, he heard the roaring of the crowd, the creaking of the

heavy wheels. Could he believe these men to be guilty, or the Republic to be saved by such an abandonment? He sat there with his set face in the little room, beginning to see himself as the Republic incarnate.

Therein lay the core of this great tragedy—he saw some other greater thing that was not himself, but a vision of the Republic bearing his own features, and began to worship it as did the crowd. He thought this awful day would make that vision of the Republic in some way real, and he confused the final advent of pure freedom and of absolutely equal law with the vain but portentous imagery of such a cloud. This sacrifice of certain right for some larger but vanitary thing worked in his mind like a poison, and on this first warm evening of the year his inner security, which the vacillation of the winter had already shaken, left him altogether.

After the sun had set over the guillotine, and as his room darkened, he felt that the tumbrils had dragged his spirit after them, and from that moment he was drawn towards his end.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE FOUR MONTHS ——

It is well to put to every division of a book a name that shall indicate its scope and thesis: there are many that might tempt one other than this which I have put at the head of the last stretch of the race. It would have been consonant with the vague tradition we have of the Revolution and with the false unity which the mind lends to every story, to call it "The Dictator." Robespierre gradually come to the supreme power in the State, exercising it with an arbitrary will, punished by a sudden revolt, would satisfy the spirit of drama. It is such a simple reading as has commonly been adopted of the tragedy; but it is false. Had I adopted that reading I could have made his story reach a natural end and have set the notes to a harmony. But the end was abrupt and unexpected, the harmony was absent, at least so far as his own life is concerned. If harmony was there, it is not to be discovered in a simple play of individual retribution, but only in the great purpose which gives to the history of Europe the movement of a providence. He was never dictator. To call him that is to overlook all modern research.

I might have spoken of this little time as "The Terror"; the Terror in chief, the Climax of it. It killed as many in seven weeks as had fallen in Paris during five years.[1] To the onlooker it was nothing but the

[1] Up to the law of Prairial there had been 1220 executions in Paris. You may add to these a hundred or so at the most for the period before the Terror. In the seven weeks succeeding the law there were 1376.

delirium of the Terror. To the imprisoned, noting this vast accession to their cells, this daily catastrophe; trembling at the enormous lists, and waiting each for his name to be called down the stone corridors, it was nothing but the delirium of the Terror. But to Robespierre it was not that at all; he had helped to lead to it, but he neither desired to make it, nor did he use it.

I have called the period "The Four Months." If there were a house in a London street where some tragedy unexplained, still debated, had passed, and of which the mystery should haunt you to the point of demanding an analysis, you could not preface that analysis with a word indicative of a definite solution, for no definite solution could be reached in your recital: you could but give for title the name—the mere number of the place: concentrate your reader upon the walls and windows which stood there dumb, not having yielded a secret; whose interest, indeed, lay in the doubt that attached to them.

So it is with Robespierre. I have put at the head of his time of power—or failure—that title of "The Four Months," because the limits of time alone are single and clear, within them there stood an intricate and ravelled process whose uncertain character I shall take to be somewhat as follows.

Robespierre from his inner room, his shrine, at the Duplays passed for the Master of the Republic: Robespierre in the public mouth was the name of the Republic, of the Terror, of everything. Robespierre in his own mind was willing, was perhaps persuaded, to think himself the master of the Republic. Robespierre in the great Committee—which alone was the true centre of power, which alone could command men, bayonets, guns, and money—was the outer man, the politician. He talked, he stood in the sun, he seemed their power in-

carnate, but to them within that sumptuous room,[1] he was the object of a mingled jealousy and irritation. He did no work, he reproached them, he absented himself. When he would have made the Terror excessive it was but for a moment and for the ends of his religion. When they were determined to persevere or extend its extreme rigour as a kind of martial law, he bickered and quarrelled, finding that rigour of theirs opposed to this Rousseauan religion of his. I say, therefore, that Robespierre passing —his mere name and reputation passing—for the Republic, accepted the homage at once, used it as things to him essential, to the Committee valueless. I say that he thought of himself as the Republic in person, and that every word spoken in the Rue St. Honoré confirmed him in that rôle. Evidently then when the Terror passed into gross conflict with common sense and necessity, when the madness that had seized the Republic had to be caught by some handle and put down, that handle, in spite of himself, was Robespierre. He had passed for Power, he had to suffer as though he had been really Power. He had brought into the Terror personal quarrels that made it the easier to combine against him. By his character he provoked reaction. The committee were glad to sacrifice him—they were unwittingly sacrificing themselves. And when he fell there fell also with him that high strain of democracy absolute which for an unnaturally long period of time he had been able to inspire in the populace. His violent death was a gasp and tremor in which the common world and its necessities returned. The whole vision of the great year

[1] I say "sumptuous" on the authority of Mercier. Now Mercier is a liar, but I can believe him here: the small employee coming in from time to time to bring papers to his masters, finding them seated in that royal room on the ground-floor and overlooking from their great inlaid table the gardens of the palace, splendid in the hot summer of '94, and the terrace of the old kings, carried away what was evidently a powerful and direct impression.

expired. It has left only that permanent part of visions; the troubling void, hunger, memory of the ideal which will still work in our society till it is compelled to the final change. We are driven to our unknown to-day by the memory of '93.

Let me show his centre of effort and describe what influence surrounded him as he approached the comedy of power. For three years he had lived in that influence; it had accentuated as time proceeded; but now that with the spring of 1794 he was lifted above all supports, and left with a gulf beneath him which determined his utter ruin, the vast height of the rôle, and the startling inadequacy of the actor are best grasped through an appreciation of the home in which he moved and the physical things that formed his most immediate and continuous world. You will see in the picture of that home of his how his vast renown rose from little things, and was like a great smoke from a small fire of weeds on a clear evening.

And by this I am very far from saying that the humility and obscurity of his refuge should suggest a meanness of the mind or an inadequacy of the spirit to its mission. It was among the chief glories of the eighteenth century that a man was regarded, I do not say independently of adventitious rank or office, but certainly independently of his material wealth in spite of all the subtle suggestions that this coarsest and falsest of criteria may carry with it. The Jacobite tradition had been able, two generations before, to flourish in an atmosphere of misery and to feed on dreams; yet another generation and Rousseau might be blamed for parasitical attachment to the great, but never for a desire to accumulate or to deal; Goldsmith's brave lyrics were not tarnished by the disorder of a garret, his spendthrift negligence did nothing to hurt his fame. Washington

was still a hero in valley forge, he would have remained as great had he died in the rags and frost of that winter. And of all the men who thus claimed immunity from the judgments of greed, none carried the tradition higher than the revolutionaries. Men, for the most part of a solid professional position, they impoverished themselves by their own enthusiasms. Condorcet dying starved, a refugee from the miserable garret of St. Sulpice, Danton bequeathing a pitiful and ruined fortune, Carnot in old age wrapped up and stiff before the empty grate of his exile—three men at utter variance in their political and social ideals testify together to the common stoicism and to the common freedom of the great souls that remade the world. Such as chose to save their comfort and increase their revenues by supple treason, the Tallyrands, the Fouchés, and the rest, were branded by their contemporaries with an odium that no later softness has found it possible to efface; for in those days the interest of haggling seemed paltry compared with the tide of living, and bribery that is the lever of stable governments was not hidden by any decent and necessary veil of hypocrisy. That time, whose fault it was to over-glorify the spirit of man, gave it at least a worthy plane of action and could see it existing of itself, distinct and untrammelled.

I would not then convey any contrast of poverty with fame. Moreover the household in which Robespierre found his repose was not poor. Duplay's income, apart from the earnings of his trade, amounted to a full six hundred pounds a year, and he had retired upon the proceeds of his savings until the outbreak of the Revolution, and the empty houses upon his hands compelled him to re-enter business. He occupied a good leasehold, of which the rent was but an eighth of his revenue, and even found himself able to purchase it when the sale of monastic land was decreed. The spirit, also, that animated this home was sound and dignified; it was a

good bourgeois place, such as France grows by nature in thousands, and such as, in their great increase during the last hundred years, now form the stable basis of her power.

But Robespierre set in this frame — Robespierre to whom the populace had lent such splendid imaginations—was *mesquin;* that is, paltry and ringing false; he was something that seemed unworthy of his theme, insipid and anæmic. In the intimacy of this man in whom the nation had chosen to discover an harmonious congeries of great qualities one might cynically expect many things. A charlatan; one drinking fame; one seizing the moment to mould a plan—it would not have disappointed a melodramatic observer to find him sombre and silent.

Well, he was none of these things. The society of his privacy pleased him because it could offer him a perpetual adulation of an unheroic kind. There he could pour out daily for years the excellent but undeveloped principles which animated his public utterances. The very virtues of simplicity, sobriety and rectitude which he honestly valued, yet furnished him also with a domestic audience whose knowledge of the world was necessarily limited and who could find a mild perpetual pleasure in the reiteration of just maxims. So perhaps I can best express the quality of the interior he fitted so well by saying that if some widely travelled and vigorously minded man—and there were many such who followed his public character with an absorbed interest and even with devotion—if such a man had followed him home to mark his domestic and real life he would not have been shocked or angered or transported or roused, but merely bored.

An honest man from the great hills of Auvergne, one that had "got on," was his silent, devoted and proud host. A young man coming in almost every

evening, to touch the spinet in his reveries, to sit silent absorbing experience, was one of his principal worshippers: a boy in whose veins ran the blood of Michael Angelo; a Buonarotti enamoured of this last Renaissance. Lebas, just, unlaughing, very brave; St. Just, grown less devoted, his eyes not resting from the wars, were his supporters. The eldest daughter of the house, Eleanor, was the betrothed who had known very little of affection, who sat like the rest in the circle of the man. Whatever it was in him that made it possible for others thus to follow—I presume his faith—radiated here intensely over a little group as, outwardly, it had radiated over and drawn up the faces of the whole people. They tolerated even the perpetual repetition of his presence. The great mirror of the mantelpiece repeated him; the great full-length portrait opposite the door; a metal bust upon the writing-table; prints upon the wall, repeated him. In the obsession of Robespierre, night after night they watched and missed reality and in that obsession of himself his own mind also was at last fixed and blind. And so, as Paris outside escaped from the influence, they still, and he himself, remained subject to it. But St. Just was a little silent; he had begun to feel footing in the real world and had already understood the soldiers.

From that cavern or temple which even now, rebuilt a century since, has something secret and remote about it, his orders issued; and his power, founded on an imaginary, proceeded for the moment absolute over the city. He had permitted the death of Danton; this negative sin pushed him on to positive extravagance in policy.

He had been compelled to admit first the Terror, then the exaggeration of the Terror, now he was compelled to follow it as it washed out to ruin. His new need dragged him in the wake of the committee. If he was to

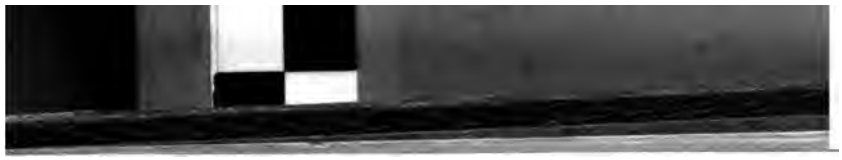
be master (and he was already in a fashion master) how could he attack the vehicle that bore him? It is characteristic of the men who will be masters (they are never masters, for a man is only the master by consent of the community) that they misapprehend the forces to their hand. If they hear some shouting in the street they take it for the People; if they read six newspapers they say, "this is Public Opinion"; and if by an unhappy accident they enter government, they take ten men round a table to be the nation. So it was with Robespierre. He had no finger on the pulse of France. He heard minorities—dwindling crowds—still shouting in the street; he sat with the rest of the Committee in the great room of the Tuileries; he thought the tide was still rising, and he consented to rise with it. In truth it had begun to ebb.

What would a true leader have done on the edge of the deliverance, on the eve of Fleurus? He would have declared his conversion to normal law, and Paris and all France would have made him more than a king. He would even now, even after the execution of Danton, have said, "This is the end. The Republic may breathe again." But Robespierre never understood breathing and living things.

The very day that Danton's head fell, the last shadow of the old executive disappeared. Carnot proposed the putting in commission of all the ministry: the subjection of these bodies to the Committee of Public Safety.

Carnot a few days later desired to arrest Hoche;[1] that grave step was taken. Did Robespierre protest? No one can tell. The veil covering these deliberations has never been lifted. He did not sign. But he was for those distant armies so palpably the ruler that Hoche wrote to him saying, "You know my virtues and I yours.

[1] The decree is signed on the 11th April. It is wholly in Carnot's handwriting, save one word, an unimportant erasure.





Save me if you can. If you cannot save me from my enemies, I shall die still praising your name."[1] Some one spoke and saved Hoche. He remained in prison unmolested.

I repeat, what he did within the Committee cannot be known. It is certain that he argued, contradicted, offended, alluded a little of his popular mastery; occasionally threatened. It is equally certain that, with all his repugnance for signing lists of the condemned, he permitted the desperate policy of the Committee to take its course. His real life was not in that room, it was in the exterior and empty authority in which he delighted. The Committee said, as it were, "Do what you will with your popularity so long as you do not break our labour." Robespierre said, "Do what you will with your plodding and your military executions so long as I can use your name for my Idea." And the populace and the Convention said, "This is Robespierre; he is the Republic, and perhaps also the Committee; let us follow." These three misunderstandings are the whole mystery of the spring of '94.

In the legend so created for him he revelled. On the 7th of May he preached another—almost the last—of those essays on religion and morals that did in truth bind his hearers, though they have exasperated posterity. Robespierre was excellent in his texts; in his exegesis intolerably wearisome. He had said to Elizabeth Duplay, that was about to be his sister-in-law, this charming

[1] If any one thinks it easy to write history, let him read this little story. Hoche is, by the admission of every one, the bravest and the frankest of the young generals. He writes to Robespierre as to a friend, and so convinced are the bureaucrats of the reality of his friendship that the letter is kept from Robespierre. It never reached him. Carnot, on the testimony of all history, is an honest man; all the Carnots have always been of the most loyal republican strain; yet Carnot (on the authority of his own son, "Memoirs," i. 450) says, "I had all the pains in the world to save Hoche from Robespierre." It is evidently a misunderstanding and a quarrel, but what passed?

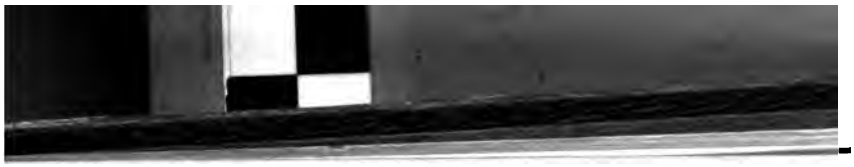
thing: "Little one, you are laughing at religion; you do not yet know quite how much comfort and hope is hidden in the depths of a permanent trust in God." But when he would develop this before a Parliament, when he would impose it upon a nation, he rang hollow, and seemed merely the dictator turned priest. Why? Because he was altogether wanting in that principal faculty of a creator of laws—the sentiment that a nation is a person, and must be addressed with the directness and the humour with which one would address the individual.

I need not quote from that long speech; it would be a repetition of the whole five years—for he at least never by thought added an inch to his mental stature. It had in it a little of the old irony. "The neighbouring governments approach the sublime; at this moment they chronicle with tenderness every action of their kings." He struck the new note of the Four months in trampling down the Herbertists that were gone, men who would have turned irreligion into a system, and who made an effort to thrust out the generosity of nature herself. The end of the whole was the sentence by which, perhaps, his mixed memory is best retained:—

"The French people recognise the being of a God and they recognise the immortality of the Soul."

With that phrase he thought that he had laid down the principle of pure religion, that from it the future would flow. For he thought (and all thought with him) that he and his contemporaries stood on nothing old and were pure creators; but behind them came the living church trembling with a hundred dogmas and as multiple as her innumerable years, as old as bread and wine. So his one truth went up therein, like breath in a frost; to-day it is acknowledged and forgotten.

The poor remnant of the Convention, "the French people," voted as they were bid. The populace also was





in that hall unseen, it also had a great unconscious vote to cast. It voted the renascence of Catholicism.

He was certainly surrounded with enthusiasm at this moment; caressed. The letters which he kept so carefully, the vast accumulation which Courtois in great part destroyed, now reached their greatest intensity, witnessed to frenzy in the auditory or proved in a hundred absurdities to what an extent his mere name had passed up into permanent meaning and had become the new epoch.[1]

It was at this moment also that his apotheosis had reached the point of exciting counter fanaticism. In a remote, damp and sombre house an aged mystic, a certain mad Catherine Théot, held a secret society of others as mad as herself. Gerle, the ex-Carthusian that had met Robespierre in the first Parliament years before, was there; so were a doctor of the Orléans, and an old countess. They would sit upon blue thrones and leave in the midst a white throne for Robespierre, "the Messiah."[2] It remained empty. It was the moment in which (20th of May) Ladmiral the clerk had asked for him vaguely, wishing to kill him, and finding him out had walked round to Collot d'Herbois and shot and missed him. It was the moment when Cécile Renauld, a girl of twenty, sauntered after dark, at nine, into the courtyard of the Duplays with two knives in her market-basket (22nd of May). There was even a talk of a plot against the Committee. St. Just was called back from

[1] At Marian in the church they sang, perhaps for a victory, the Te Deum. At its close the people cheered for the Republic. Then some solemn man remembered Robespierre. They cheered for Robespierre, and the commune of Marian sent him a letter describing the incident. It is interesting to remark that the sister of Mirabeau also wrote to him at this epoch. If the phrase, "Dear Robespierre," seems a little cold, it must be remembered that it was from a woman whose brother had been disinterred and his ashes thrown to the winds.

[2] There exists also a touching letter from an old man in a lost village who calls him "The Messiah of the New World."

the army of the north,[1] came to Paris for a week, saw the nonsense of it and went back to his soldiers.

But the key to the end was already supplied in the phrase of one of these thousand letters. "A reputation which *not even enemies* attempt to assail."[2] That was the truth, and it was the particular truth that killed him. No one could deny his sincerity, no one at that time dreamt of denying his creed. He tortured men with consistency. They could not destroy him with argument, they attacked him at last with the sudden revolt of nature. Barère in his account to the Convention of the attempt of Cécile Renauld supplied, unconsciously, another argument. He spoke (and it was true enough) of the way in which Robespierre had become abroad a personification of the Revolution: for the English, who made him out a kind of tyrant; for the Germans, who turned him into a proverb—we know now that he might have added, "for that peaceful foreigner posterity who judges things impartially and is often wrong." He meant his appeal to mean, "We are specially indignant at the attempt on Robespierre's life, because he is taken by most ignorant people for the Republic itself, and therefore the attempt was an attempt on the Republic." But the Convention was thinking silently as it listened, "Why do ignorant people think him to be the Republic?"

The Feast of the Deity, the solemnity that his speech of a month before had caused to be decreed, followed that passage of enthusiasm and danger. He caused himself (it would be pedantic to use any other phrase —the Convention was not free) to be elected President for the second time upon the Fourth of June; on the 8th Paris had its fill of Symbolism, and the ridiculous, which dogs symbolism as the fear of waking will dog a good

[1] This letter was signed by all the committee, and oddly enough twice over by Robespierre.

[2] The expression is in Vaquier's letter at the end of Courtois' collection and report.

dream at the end of the night, caught up that festival in mid way and broke it even as it was acting.

To Robespierre, who was never touched by the ridiculous, this feast was entrancing. By nine o'clock of that brilliant summer morning he was already pacing, impatient, fasting, in the halls of the Tuileries.

Vilate met him and said, "Have you breakfasted?"

"No," said Robespierre, " . . . look out at that garden and at all the people flocking. Nature is coming in. . . ."

Vilate proposed that he should breakfast. They went up hastily to eat something in Vilate's little room at the top of the Pavillon de Flore, and Robespierre, still absorbed, went to the attic window more than once, looked out from that height and repeated—

"That part of humanity is the most absorbing of all. . . . I could say the whole world was here . . . there are tyrants who will grow pale when they hear of this. . . ."[1]

Then under the growing heat he went through the show of cardboard and strong colours burning the statue of Atheism, walking at the head of the Parliament to the Champ de Mars, wrapped up in the applause of the crowd, and in the music, and in the new, simple and perfect religion he was giving to the world. All the while his little figure in its white nankeen breeches and blue coat was overwhelmed by the great tricolour sash and the great tricolour plumes of the full dress: it was the only time that he approached in appearance the deputies on mission, for he was never with the armies. But a man that had known our Europe better than David would have concealed among these symbols a figure of Laughter, tiptoe, with the legs of a faun and pointed ears.

He came back to his home filled—falsely—with the

[1] "Vilate," p. 34 of the original edition.

sense of power. He came back happy, and found happiness there: Lebas' little son had been born that day. Then in the full illusion of the opening summer, seeing himself everywhere, and feeling France as though it were mixed with his own blood, he imagined a full authority; he drafted the law of the 10th of June—the 22nd Prairial [1]—and began to reveal himself as he was. It was just two days after he had most appeared as a symbol over France that he began the plunge down into reality and recognition.

The decree of that day—a decree drawn up in his own hand [2]—proposed by his man, Couthon, forced upon the Assembly by his voice and the vague menace of his omnipotent reputation—may be stated in the single word, tyranny; but it was a tyranny such as never could last for a year on this earth, such as no remote lord of Africa could have exercised over his own bought slaves.

It had one major clause: it suppressed the defence. The revolutionary tribunal was not based upon forms. It was a court-martial, the mere servant of the Terror. But it had maintained the exterior of law. It was not the right of defence that led to the numerous acquittals, or that imperilled the yet more numerous condemnations. But the defence delayed and gave a formality to the action of the court. It made it civilian; it forbade summary execution. The law of Prairial was designed to make the Committee as absolute as a conqueror is over a city taken by assault.

I have said that Robespierre made this law; forced it upon the Convention. He desired, then, to make the Committee tyrant—and he thought the Committee was

[1] But he is not the author of the law of the 17th April, which summoned all cases of conspiracy and treason to Paris. Here, as so often, he is doing nothing but following on the action of others, since the law of the 22nd Prairial would have been nothing but for this predecessor.

[2] As was also the instruction to the committee that were terrorising the south, the "Commission d'Orange," 21st Floreal.

one with him, as he thought the nation was. He did more. When Bourdon, of the Oise,[1] a man whom he fixed for destruction, claimed that no member of the Assembly could be brought before the revolutionary tribunal without the consent of the Assembly, he vigorously maintained that the discussion should be let drop. "Give us the strength," he cried in a sudden inspiration, "to bear the great burden you have laid upon our shoulders." That is, make us dictators absolute, trust us with all powers to save the Republic. Already, in the first debate on the law, he had insisted against any adjournment; he had argued it clause by clause, and, with a species of closure by menace, he had dictated it to the Parliament; he had passed it in one sitting. He made the law, and he only. Why did he make it?

I will hazard this paradox. It cannot be proved, it is but an hypothesis, but it is the only hypothesis that explains all. He made it in order to impose the pure Republic upon the nation, and connected with that idea was a determination to end the Terror. Could a gross accentuation of the Terror tend to close it—save by extermination? It was not thus the problem presented itself to him. His chief antagonists, the men whom he thought to stand between him and the goal of the Revolution, were the irresponsible proconsuls in the provinces. He demanded in this law a sword against them. Some time before,[2] in a note written in his own hand, and signed first by him, the committee had recalled Fouché from Lyons. At the end of May he, almost of his own initiative, had arrested Thereza Cabarrus, the mistress of Tallien.[3] He aimed directly at

[1] There is an MS. note of Robespierre's on Bourdon: "This man goes about with the gait and habit of a criminal, seeking the opportunities of crime."

[2] On the 7th of Germinal (the 27th March).

[3] This warrant of arrest (of the 22nd May) was the most direct cause of the fall of Robespierre. It is a curious document, very characteristic

Tallien himself, who had spilt so much blood at Bordeaux, and had taken suddenly in that unhappy city to lounging across drawing-rooms, and to posing as the southern voluptuary; an actor.

There was a kind of man (there were but six or seven of them in the Convention) particularly odious to Robespierre, and he was of such a nature that what was odious to him he believed of necessity to be odious also to God, to Nature, and to the Republic. This kind of man, who had taken advantage of the Revolution in order to excel in licence, who was the very antithesis of Rousseauan stoicism, who was commonly an atheist, always an evil liver, seemed in the eyes of Robespierre to be a cancer in the State. If it be asked why, to achieve his final purpose to destroy these men and to impose upon the nation the Republic that haunted him he had recourse to such a venture as the law of the 22nd of Prairial, the answer is that men so utterly out of touch with reality as he was can imagine no strength save the crude absolute of power. Just as some modern men in politics will conduct a war under the impression that victory means something they have seen on a stage, a thing of one blow, so this insufficient intellect thought that mastery did not exist unless it were final and one. And this it thought because it had in no way the genius of mastery.

That he had it in his mind to stop the Terror, to

of his habits; it is written out in his own hand; he has signed it first at the top, then he has scratched out his first signature and signed it again at the bottom. There are no capital letters, not even to the word "Republic"; and as nothing from his hand could be written without a recasting of style, there is even in these few lines an erasure. Therezia Cabarrus was a Spaniard, not yet of age. Six years before, on the eve of the Revolution, she had been married as a girl of fifteen to the Marquis de Fontenay, who divorced her. Tallien married her in the winter after Thermidor (26th December, '94), and divorced her in 1802. In 1805 she married the Prince de Chimay, and died long after in his castle at Chimay, still bearing that unlucky title. She had borne seven children to these three husbands, and four others besides.

appear as a kind of saviour of France, we know, not from the calculated accounts made long after the reaction (they are valueless), but from the natural outbursts of Thermidor.

Barrère, just after the death of Robespierre, let loose a sentence that betrays it all: "He perished because he would have stopped the great career of the Revolution." Billaud, a fanatic not to be trusted with the sword, violent, worthy of death, therefore a man whose expletives must necessarily be honest, poured out, as will be seen in a moment, a torrent of invective against Robespierre in the debates that determined his fall; and all this invective turns upon Robespierre's attempting to stop the Terror. I repeat, it cannot be absolutely proved but it is the only workable hypothesis, that the law of the 10th of June was the wild grasping at the full externals of power by a man who did not understand the nature of power; and he so grasped at it because he believed that all France was behind him, and that he would be able quickly and without debate to end the welter of persecution and to save society; there was then something in this unsoldierly man of the Cæsarist, and every Cæsar has felt something in common with him—none more than Napoleon.

Now, from the law of the 22nd of Prairial, and from the direct determination of Robespierre to wipe out the few remaining men that seemed to obstruct the advent of a settled and an ideal state, there sprang two things.

The committee found itself finally omnipotent; that was the first thing.

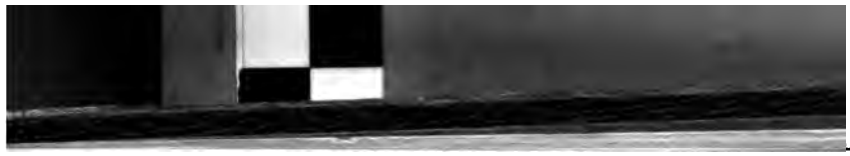
The second thing was that the men whom he so openly aimed at, entered, as their nature was, into a conspiracy.

To the committee, of which Robespierre erroneously imagined himself to be the master, which he thought to be, like the Convention, awed by the memory of his awful popularity, the law of the 22nd of Prairial was what a

gift of money is to a man already wealthy and avaricious and deep in speculations. Carnot (insisting upon the feeding of the armies and believing that the Terror alone could do it); Barrère (determined to keep in existence the organ of government with which he alone was acquainted, and of which he was the mouthpiece); Prieur (considering the breakdown of his foreign policy which would follow too close an examination of the committee by the Convention)—they and all the rest of the committee saw in the Terror a means of government which appeared to be failing them as the victories increased. They seized upon the law of Prairial as an opportune completion of their power; they used it as Robespierre never wished it to be used, and when he asked them immediately after the passing of the decree for the heads of the last few men that remained (as he believed) the enemies of his system, he was bluntly refused. The Committee was weary of his affectation of control; it was determined to use for its own purposes the law which he had made; to centralise the action of the government and especially its power of sudden stroke and punishment in Paris. In seven weeks it had put to death nearly 1400 men.

From this sprang the obscure quarrel upon which, in the face of all the contradictions and secrecy which throw a veil over the debates of the Ten, historians can never be secure judges. Only one thing is certain that he attended the meetings of the Committee with reluctance, that he argued against their most fundamental decisions, that he threatened them with an obstinacy that can only have been based upon a false judgment of his power of control, and that, in fine, he grew increasingly irksome to the handful of men who were still governing France.

The lower committee, which controlled the police of the city, was already uniformly hostile to him. Vadier got up in the most ridiculous fashion the case of the old mystic Catherine Théot; he presented his report to the





Convention in such a fashion that he appeared to be defending Robespierre, while in every phrase the old buffoon knew that he was wounding him and bleeding him; in every phrase he ridiculed religion, and Robespierre in the chair sat silent and disgusted. This was less than a week after the passing of the law.

Robespierre's answer to that insult was a kind of revolt against the committees. He came indeed regularly enough, he signed before the middle of Messidor six important documents with his colleagues; on the 16th of that month he wrote out a letter to the representatives on mission in the name of the Committee; on the 28th he even took the initiative in recalling Dubois Crancé from Rennes, and on the same day he was glad enough to sign an order for the release of thirty-three prisoners whom Rousselin had arrested in Troyes. It cannot be said that he absented himself in body from the committee. It has been proved that between the law of the 22nd Prairial to the day of his fall in Thermidor, he was actually absent from the committee but six times, just once a week; but though he was not physically absent he was morally separated from the majority of his colleagues. He only came to interfere with their principal work. Of all the lists of the hundreds that were sent in that terrible summer to the revolutionary tribunal, he signed after the beginning of Messidor but one, and that the least important, and when he came to defend himself in his long final speech to the Convention on the day before his fall, he said in so many words:—

"I will not make public the debates of the Committee; I will confine myself to saying that for the last six weeks the force of calumny has made it impossible for me to arrest the torrent of evil deeds. . . . I far prefer my character of a representative of the people to that of a member of the Committee of Public Safety."

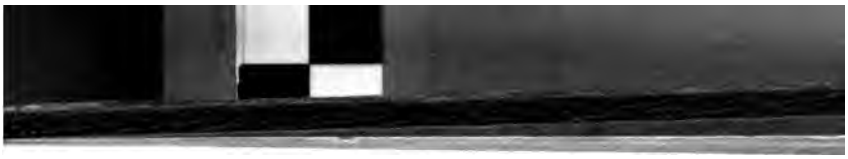
In the same speech he said (and he was perfectly sincere in it):—

"I was but for a few days at the head of the police because one of my colleagues was absent; I was concerned with the arrest of perhaps some thirty men, and yet that little time has given an excuse for telling every man that if he is imprisoned it is I who am to blame."

The suspicion with which he was haunted was not wholly just. There was indeed a definite conspiracy already formed against him, but that conspiracy was extraneous to the Committee. It was Fouché and Tallien and their friends, the lost men of the Convention, men utterly inferior to the Government, that were weaving the conspiracy. The Committee, exasperated at his pride, his silence, his opposition, his refusal to accept their policy, were yet not actively dragging him down; it was because his name had become identified with that of the Revolution, because he had yielded to the great temptation of the winter, that now this nemesis had come. He could not escape from the accusation that he was himself the Republic, himself the Government, and himself the Terror. He had chosen to pass for the Revolution incarnate; now that, with the victories certain and the nation safe, the Terror was becoming odious, he was compelled still to pass, in spite of himself, for the incarnate Terror, and in all the cabinets of Europe, in all the prisons throughout France, Robespierre was the name of that intolerable anachronism.[1]

Caught in this trap, which his own yielding to ambition had laid, Robespierre advanced to meet his fate by falling into every error that could ruin him.

[1] When Madame Duplay was thrust into the prison on the 9th of Thermidor (a prison from which she never came out alive), one of the prisoners asked who she was, and another answered, "She was the Queen, but now she is dethroned." On this string even the jailers harped as the rest of her household came in under arrest.





I have described in an earlier portion of this book how by nature he avoided the mention of personal names. How, in the great quarrel with the Girondins upon the question of war, for once that he said the word "Brissot" or "Roland" his opponents spoke his own name ten times.

On his lips there were always such phrases as, "a certain faction," "men of such and such a kind," and so forth; it was mania for generalities upon which he could pursue his mania for deduction.

I have described also how, when he merged into the new violence of Paris after the 10th of August, he for a moment became more direct and how there was apparent in him a permanent bitterness and a kind of venom which pricked his opponents to fury. He was then upon a rising tide; the people demanded government; he was one of the conquerors of the Gironde.

Now that he was losing, this feature reappeared. In the beginning of the great quarrel in which he fell he had attempted to make a general description which his audience were intended to apply to Bourdon. Bourdon rose up in a fury, crying, "It has been pointed out pretty clearly in this speech that I am a scoundrel." Robespierre, losing control, had answered from the tribune: "In the name of the country, let these interruptions cease. It is an awful peril for any man to name himself. If he is determined to recognise himself in the portrait I have drawn, in the portrait which my duty has compelled me to draw, it is not in my power to prevent him." From several quarters of the hall there had arisen the cry of "Names!" Robespierre had only answered, "I will name them when I must."[1]

That was in Prairial. In Messidor, as his danger drew nearer, he broke out into direct invective. He

[1] In the debate on the law of Prairial see *Moniteur* of the 26th Prairial, the year II.

attacked Fouché on the 11th of July, and when Fouché replied on the 14th, the day of the great anniversary, Robespierre met him with further direct accusations.

"What is this fear which troubles him? Is it perhaps the eyes of the people? Is it perhaps that his wretched face proves him too clearly the author of a crime?" And he ended with the straight words: "These men have put patriots in prison because they dared to break silence. That is the crime of which I accuse Fouché."

But though he had only six or seven in mind, he that had passed by his own fault for the Master of the Terror seemed to be accusing every one. He made the Convention tremble and the Jacobins. And who shall say that he took no pleasure in such a simulacrum of power? Yet even that had left him. The great victories in the north-east had thrown the populace into an ardent need for repose. It was like the craving for sleep that falls upon men who have overstrained their powers in a bout of feverish games. And the centre of all authority, the only immediate possessors of material power, the Committee, were against him. The seven workers were leaving him ostracised, and were drawing a sharp line between themselves and his two friends, Couthon and St. Just.

To these difficulties he added yet another. It will be remarked that men in their difficulties, and especially before their death, often return to the influences of their childhood. In such crises the stirp of the man reappears. So Robespierre, that had always preached himself, seen himself, and, if the phrase be not unjust, unconsciously worshipped himself, now in these last days returned to the self-pity of that mournful and isolated time of his orphanage. He found all power leaving him, and thought himself a victim. Perhaps he still believed that the people of Paris in some vague way would support him. He was wrong. There was but one thing

ready to support him, the Commune of Paris, and that Commune did not represent the people at all. He had himself thrust in upon it his own supporters.

Down in Nantes a young representative on mission[1] intercepted two letters which Fouché had written to his sister. They spoke plainly of the coming attack, "in which it was hoped that all would turn for the best." He sent them back to the Committee of Public Safety. Perhaps by their enmity, perhaps by this young man's tardiness, the letter did not come until Robespierre had fallen.

It was on the 5th of Thermidor that he first received a clear warning. The two committees united to send him a note summoning him as though he were a power outside them and inimical to them: it was a kind of writ. He came to them and replied to their questions; but a trial of that kind where a man suspected of betraying or attacking the body he belongs to is called up before his colleagues, goes as it were by default; it is a verdict, and condemns of itself. He met the supreme moment of danger in a manner that was a summary of his whole life; he fell back upon his pen.

There was lying on the little plain table of his room a mass of sheets which he had been working, modelling, recasting during all these weeks of increasing uncertainty.[2] He turned to them and perfected his plea. For two days he wrote unceasingly. Around him, inspiring him a little in his defence, was the severity that had been the furniture of his strict simplicity; the plain small bed;[3] the little deal shelf where his few books, his

[1] A person of the name of Bo.

[2] That is a mere conjecture, but it is Michelet's, and surely sound. No one can look at those innumerable collections or savour the close style and great length of the speech without seeing in it a labour of much more than the last two days.

[3] Those who care for detail may be curious to learn that the curtains of this bed were made out of an old blue dress of Madame Duplay's.

Rousseau, Corneille and Pascal stood together; the straw-bottomed chair. He wrote and wrote with the noise of the carpenters beneath his window, and, in the street beyond the archway of the courtyard, the noise of the city in summer, and, twice, the cries and terror of the tumbrils. It was the shrine or cell whence he had seen all the height of the Revolution go by, and in which he had moulded a hundred speeches that had expressed, but not determined, its course. It was the room in which he had sat, certain of his own mind when he told them to shut the outer door upon the passage of Louis to his death: in which, disturbed but evilly tenacious he had heard come into him the death-song of Danton. Now he himself was here parrying off the end, he thought, with scratched and repeated phrases.

He left his room but twice in these forty-eight hours. Once to walk out at sunset for the last time with Eleanor — his dog beside him. Again in the same evening to make a vague, troubling speech at the Jacobins on the persecution that virtue was suffering; that he was suffering. It roused the club, still his chief weapon, to present a petition to the Convention; and that petition seemed yet another menace to the Parliament.

On the evening of the 7th his work was done. It is to be noted that he never doubted of its success; he was more confident at the close of his labour than he had been in all the growing peril of Messidor.

In the last hours of daylight, in the warmth and splendour of a weather that was but just beginning to introduce the oppression of storm, he left his completed phrases and, taking the boy, Nicholas Duplay,[1] that had sometimes been his secretary, walked up and out to the hill of Chaillot. There he sauntered, talking gently of common

[1] They called him "Nicholas of the wooden leg" because he had lost a limb at Valmy. He was the nephew of Duplay. He lived on well into our century and had a son, who became a doctor of some repute and has preserved this little scene.

things, quietly gay, catching at the midges with his hand, permitting himself at moments reverie. The next day he read his speech to the Convention.

There is no need to detail the character or to quote the many phrases of his defence. Noted on its margin were names he did pronounce, its character lay in an opening sentence.

"I shall make it my task to expose the abuses that are about to ruin the country, and that your honesty alone can correct. If I speak of the persecution to which I have been latterly subject, count it no crime in me, the cause is your cause also. . . . I come here to make no accusations: that province is in the hands of others."

In a famous and dignified passage that has a quality parallel to but lower than nobility, he asks what kind of tyranny that can have been in him which made all the tyrants of Europe find him their chief enemy; he prophesies clearly and with a separate marked passage the advent of a military despotism upon his ruin, and, since it might come to death, he passed upon death, upon his own death, his final judgment:—

"Believe me, it is not an eternal sleep. I would have it written upon all graves that they are the entry to immortality."

It was not upon the Convention, uncertain, reading into his words the menace he may have intended to convey, that he depended. He depended in the last resort upon the great society that had so long been the mistress of the Revolution, and over which his name still stood like a command. That evening he re-read his appeal in the crowded chapel and before the high passion of the Jacobins. They heard him with such zeal that he seemed to them in his lonely tribune the Reform living, the Reform on the threshold of death. He ended with:—

"This that you have heard is my testament and my will."

Then he lifted off the spectacles that spoilt his gaze, showed his sharply featured face silhouetted by the candles before it, and, leaving his manuscript, said to them all:—

"If I must drink the hemlock, I will drink it."

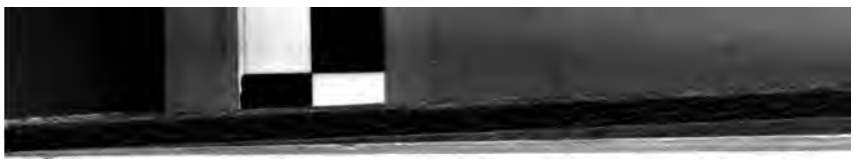
David of the swollen jaw cried out to him loudly from the throng and darkness of the nave:—

"I will drink it with you."

Frenzy and something lyrical caught the press of the Jacobins and ran, a flame, along the hall. Billaud-Varennes, Collot d'Herbois, chiefly enemies; Dubarran, Duval, lesser men, were listening there also; they were recognised. One at least was struck at with a poniard; they were pushed through the doors of the chapel out into the night, and behind them the club, enthusiastic and possessed with a presentiment, feeling that their vision and this man of theirs would end together and that the turn of the battle had come, cried that a 2nd of June was needed, that Paris should march upon the Parliament, that one last stroke of the scythe would clear the field.

As the fugitives fled angrily from the arches of the courtyard they heard the air full not only of clamour, but of rising and conquering music. The Jacobins sang of the Republic, and with the falling of their chorus their power passed out into the void and was extinguished.

So the Jacobins ended their song. But three spirits that night, the three fates of Robespierre, kept watch till the morning—the Conspiracy, the Commune, the Committee. The Committee was the foremost. The Commune thought itself the immediate power. The Conspiracy was the one thing active and determined, the one thing that understood how far this mixture of tyranny, special policy, symbolism, and madness had





overshot the mark; how much France and the Convention demanded rest.

THE CONSPIRACY.—And none of the three slept. The Conspirators went from one to another; they threw away at last their shreds of theory, their mask of principle, for the mere sake of existence. They put before themselves the simplest of objects: to live and to kill what would have stopped their living; for they were livers all of the worst, plunged up to the neck in sense, and half ruined in their earliest youth by the excess of living. Yet they grasped hold of life with the blind tenacity of panic, because life was all they knew. God gave it them, and the name of Fouché is enough to show the material they were permitted to use.

All that night, then, in the defence of their lives, they worked with every lever and upon every side to upset the last strong ruins of Robespierre's power. They approached the isolated politicians of the Mountain and plied them with what could not be denied, the name of master that was given to Robespierre; his latter dissociation from the strict republicans, and his leaning to the Right. The Mountain gave them some disdainful pledge—it did not seem enough.

They passed, did these men whom all in common despised, but in whom all in common saw a kind of necessary vengeance, to the silent relics of what had been the moderates: to Boissy d'Anglas with his great name, to Siéyès with his memories—perhaps to Grégoire. To these they promised (with how little belief in their word and with what unconscious power of prophecy!) the close of the Terror. None knew better than the Conspirators that their own deaths would be the surest opportunity for the entry of civil law and of amnesties. But the Conspirators played here upon the surest chord. So identified was the Terror with extreme theory and with the person of Robespierre that it seemed as though

to end the one was to end the other too; and the man was easiest ended. It was slowly, and in the painful decision of the sleepless morning, that the Right thus consented to vote against the man who had so long stood between them and the guillotine.

THE COMMUNE.—There was also in Paris that second force which has run through these pages like a chord. Paris had once felt her mastery, had organised her authority, and had, with the proud irresponsibility which belongs alike to kings and aristocracies, enforced herself upon the inaction of the nation. The municipal government, framed in the moment of most extreme danger, and depending upon the theory of the city's leadership, remained; and the men that composed it still thought themselves in some legitimate way the masters. If such and such were arraigned, the Commune were the justice of France to judge their treason; if the national effort weakened they were the ordained and elected force to restore its vigour. They did not know how much they had lost France; they had lost *Paris* itself, these last abandoned extremists whom a receding tide had left stranded, whom the sections would not follow, and whose command now seemed extravagant. Yet in good faith and even with confidence they also kept vigil. If Robespierre fell, there fell with him all their creed of justice.

Hanriot, on the 2nd of June, had achieved one revolution, he was sure he could achieve another, and in the night he sent out his orders to the sections and their cannon. We shall see how they hesitated and doubted and did little.

France, for which Paris exists, had no more need of Paris. Payan, however, pure Robespierrean, not even Parisian, worked hard at the head of the municipality for Robespierre. Haughty and a little flippant, that young man next day entered the den of the Committee

at noon and escaped safe. He also did not sleep, all the night he summoned, organised, and watched.

If the Commune had still been the Commune all the armed men would have stirred in the night and out of the mouths of twenty little narrow streets the pikes and the cannon would have poured upon the Place de Grève till the whole great square would not have held them. It would have been once more the 2nd of June or the 10th of August; Paris made united by a word of command or authority. But Authority was wanting. The General Will that was known as Authority was silent. A lesser authority remained, the Parliament; and by Authority the French people live. Robespierre (whom Hanriot and all the Commune sat up that night to defend) dared not defy Authority. He perished because he could not sign an order outside law and separate from the general mandate.

THE COMMITTEE.—Up in a high room of the Pavillon de Flore, the southern pavilion of the palace, five of the Committee sat in silence round the great table. The despotic council that the Republic had imposed upon herself with a marvellous instinct to her own salvation was at the extreme verge of its power, and the night, that had inspired their secrecy and intensity for many months of doubtful struggle and that had nourished their continued silence, still presided like a steadfast mistress over their end. The battle was over, and it is fitting to regard those few hours of darkness as the close of a great action in which, take them for all in all, these ill-assorted men had saved the nation.

Nor was their passing watched by the overhanging night alone. Beneath their windows, the wall of the Tuileries—a gulf over Paris, a cliff, below which the Seine ran low and meagre in the great heat, up which there surged at this late hour the noise of the flood of reaction, confused, eddying, rising—was the abrupt em-

blem of the suddenness of this end. The relaxation of inhuman heroisms, inflexible cruelties, mad judgments, and unattainable visions was come, and with the loosening of the hard revolutionary grasp there snapped at once the bond that had held the strange fabric rigid. Next day all the new France was to lapse into turmoil. But the confusion of waters was the launching of a ship, and years after the Modern State, that men thought lost, was to ride even and secure.

The five were Barrère, a Gascon, uncertain, waiting; the three workers—Carnot, the soldier; the lawyers Prieur and Lindet—and lastly, St. Just. But these five, of whom certain historians in the light of what was to come, would make two camps, were by no means so clearly divided. A kind of suspicion made the silence difficult, and sharpened the ear of each to the scratching of the quills. Yet no one had spoken the word, or even harboured it. Barrère was still unsure, Carnot still absorbed in orders. They knew Robespierre that had irked and half deserted them, to be in jeopardy. St. Just they knew to be his shield-bearer. Yet one thing only concerned the workers, to be allowed to continue their work; and one thing only concerned Barrère, to be allowed to remain the voice and the official of what was now without question the sole government. Nevertheless Robespierre's continued power would have widened the gulf between him and the Committee, while if the balance trembled ever so little against him, that little would prove enough to throw Carnot and all Carnot's following into the opposing scale, and the Committees would become the executioners of the triumvirs. As yet that had not come, and the five still worked in silence.

They had so sat for about an hour with barely a word between them, save when one or the other passed round an order for the rest to sign.

It was eleven o'clock, the Jacobins had just poured

their angry flood into the street, chasing Billaud and Collot before them. This last ran, beside himself, down the dark lane of the stables, followed by his clique, and gathering round him as he passed into the palace some few of the lower committee. They sprang, full of their defeat and insults, up the great staircase of the pavilion, and calling and reviling confusedly, broke into the room where the five were sitting.

Collot d'Herbois, ill-balanced, with his tortured face of anger and shame, threw out openly against St. Just all those words which had worked under the surface of so many minds for so long.

"They, the Committee, the whole Republic was oppressed. They could not breathe. There was a dictatorship, and it was even insolent. Here to-night in the crisis of their fortunes it had left them face to face with a child. Why was not Robespierre there to answer him? Where was Couthon? They were left with a boy, St. Just, to deal with; they were insulted with a child."

He would repeat the word, "a *child*, a *child*." It was the best insult he could find to pay back in their own coin the stings of the Jacobins.

St. Just's great beauty, his stature, his youth, his birth, were a power to him. He had risen when his enemies stumbled in, and had asked coldly, as though it was small talk, "what was on at the Jacobins." During the confused rush of words that poured from Collot, mingled with the interjections of the rest, St. Just remained standing. Then he sat down, as quietly, and took paper to draft what he had determined to say to the Convention in the morning, leaving on the other side of the table a small erect crowd that still cried and menaced, and that the remaining members of the great Committee half supported, half soothed into silence.

What scene was that which occupied the remaining hours? The accounts are varied, the details confused.

It was barely half-an-hour before midnight when St. Just sat down to write; his head held, as he had always held it, stiffly in the half-military stock that recalled the eastern victories. But midnight came early in the scene. For hours there were outbursts of recrimination on the part of the new-comers, unanswered or hardly answered by the young man before them, with his eyes downward: with the fine oval of his face fixed like steel enamelled.

And in those hours the workers still worked, Barrère still temporised. Perhaps some few of the interrupters slept. St. Just wrote on, drawing up that requisitory which, had it been pronounced, might have saved his friend.

An uneasy dawn, the long early dawn of midsummer began to mark the tall curtains of the room and to show reality shivering. The twin candelabra burnt paler, and the details of the high cornice, the regal details that the committee had inherited, appeared against the painted ceiling. The polished woodwork of the parquetted floor shone in the half light. The workers still worked on, Barrère still hesitated—indeed, he hardly understood the quarrel. The whole of the second committee had filtered in, and sprawled half asleep, half awake in the midst of their masters. The fool Lecointre, in an agony, thinking all depended upon immediate action, had armed himself to the teeth, stuffed into his trousers pockets two pistols with miniature bayonets, the points of which poked outwards, and had been hammering at the door. Not he but his note had at last been admitted. It merely urged them to arrest Hanriot and check the Commune—a plan which eight hours more did not suffice to argue out or determine. Meanwhile the one representative of Robespierre still sat impassible as the light grew; he scratched out, rewrote and moulded his thesis of defence. Throughout this work he lifted his head from time to time to speak in some commonplace phrase or other to his colleagues. He

avoided any general enmity. When he addressed the two committees as a whole it was to assure them that the Committee of Public Safety should see his work before he read it to the Convention, nor could even an eye-witness have known that those four colleagues of his were ready for his death; and for that of Couthon, absent, and for that of Robespierre.

When it had been for some time fully light, so that the candles were blown out and the faces of these sleepless men, though haggard and unnatural, turned to the new task of a new day, St. Just rose at last, and took his hat and his papers gravely, and passed out from the room, to which he returned so soon outlawed, a prisoner, and maimed. Without, it smelt of morning. But the morning was not sunlit. There was no promise in the deserted streets, nor any lifting of the heart. The sky was ominous and veiled, the air charged with the silent approach of storm as he passed up the narrow streets to his home.

Robespierre, back under his own roof, thought to have found security.

That short summer night, in which his fate was gathering, as the thunder did, weighed upon him with no incumbent menace, and conveyed, to him, no prefatory silence of doom. His mind, still absorbed in those abstractions whose matter was little beyond the image of himself, remained equable and closed as ever to the portents that were already troubling so many between the daylight and the daylight. The influence of the time, the close air and the dark sky, the vision of the crowded prisons, the indefinable unquiet rumour that passes through great cities as they await a climax in their history, left undisturbed that unnatural ease of his which had earned him falsely the titles of greater men. Yet he was the victim upon whom this tragedy converged. The general face of nature, whose features men more

ordinary and more human comprehend by a generous instinct, was fixed upon him with a gaze that might have moved him to heroic exclamation or to frenzy, had not his soul been incapable alike of enthusiasms or of terrors. It was upon him—if one may personify the physical character of a time—that this July night had fixed the level eyes of necessity. He did not feel the gaze; he was able to repose. The scene at the Jacobins which had drawn such a cry from David and will ever remain a mark in the history of his country, had not the power to change the course of those habits which best reflected his interior life. He continued the exact care of his clothing and his unalterable determination to purge mankind of evil and to restore it to its origins of simplicity. He slept soundly his short and easy sleep, rose at his accustomed hour, dressed with minute care and with the touch of over-neatness that had distinguished him from the delirious crowd, and put on for the encounter of that day the light-blue coat which had become his habitual wear and which he had first used six weeks before in the feast of the Supreme Being.

As he left the house Duplay came to the door with him, anxious and full of warning: a generous friend. Robespierre answered him with the thin but almost genial smile that was the constant mark of his assurance. "The Convention was honest in the main—all great masses of men were honest."

So he went out into the stifling air and under the grey sky with the restrained and decent step that all men had recognised so long, crossed the street and turned down the narrow lane to the palace, leaving behind him the unsatisfied foreboding of a simple and loyal man, humbler, but much wiser than himself; for he never came home, and he never slept again.

# CHAPTER X

## "THERMIDOR"

It was close on noon. The Convention had met, troubled under a troubled sky, and busy with an instinct that will sometimes permeate great assemblies; the vague anxiety that, for all their hesitation, fate is using them for a certain work. Each member of those obscure hundreds felt himself helpless and in doubt, but knew how that very helplessness would leave him at the mercy of such orgasms as seize suddenly upon multitudes; for at this late hour men had learnt the fallacy of corporate action and had discovered that a number gathered is far more than the sum of its individuals, and that there broods over it, ready to drive it to madness, or heroism, or panic, or superhuman resolutions, the spirit of the Horde.

Two little groups present there knew very well at what they aimed, yet, though they were direct opposing enemies, their aims were not strictly contrasted. It was the arena, the moment and necessity for victory, that drew them up against one another, and the necessity for an issue that made the life of Robespierre the stake of the game.

The first group were those few conspirators to whom the rule of a Puritan and the pressure of one man had grown from the odious to the intolerable. They were indeed mere spokesmen, and it is a character never to be forgotten in the history of Thermidor that by a mixture of confusion and disgust the solid opposition to Maximilian abandoned its expression to men whose character

none valued and whose violence and irresponsibility left them free for every adventure. They were a voice, were Fréron, Tallien, Fouché and the rest, but they spoke (if they succeeded) for a definitely formed opinion. They spoke for the irritation of the working members of the great Committee; for the jealousy and exasperation of a lower committee that was almost unanimous; for the fears of many extremists returned from their work in the provinces and dreading vengeance. All these (and there might be added to them many soldiers, diplomats, administrators), were fighting the final success of a régime in which an extreme political idealism and the fanaticism for its tribune might destroy the whole accomplished work of one, the pleasures of another, the life of a third.

Against the conspirators there were ranged a yet smaller body, the friends of Robespierre but the friends of much more. Couthon, St. Just, Lebas, Payan felt a net drawing round their Perfect State just at its rising. The practical and the judicious—compromise—perhaps reaction—were appearing on the horizons of their battlefield and converging upon their great experiment. A way had to be cut through such enemies and their scheme saved to the world. For the Perfect State had from a goal become a present vision to these men and their adherents; in them, by a rare political phenomenon, success had not dissipated the ideal nor turned it into a memory, but had raised it above earth and given it the strength and reality of a creed. They had passed from affirmation to prophecy, and where the enthusiasm of others had fed upon the war and the defence and had fallen with the victories, theirs only grew the more lyrical and exalted from what they conceived to be the military security of their new world.

Of these men the most determined, the sanest and yet the most inspired was St. Just. Very young and

violent as he was, he yet had the broadest view and the largest potentialities—he was not ignorant of humour; he could bargain. He had formed of the social spirit that the Jacobins were occupied in creating a fuller and a more human conception than had any of his circle. He would have given it a religion, he would have organised a legislature that would be popular without anarchy, and an executive that would have remained impersonal and representative without any exaggeration of numbers. I would not convey that he was of a calibre to guide the Republic nor pretend that such a flame could, in ordinary times, have done more than consume; had (for example) Robespierre achieved his plan, the boy St. Just would surely have failed where the man Carnot succeeded. But I mean that among those enthusiasts of which he formed a member it was he who most thoroughly entered into men, whose dream would have made the better poem or picture, whose art was the firmest. He had been a soldier, he had seen the common man at work in the trenches by Charleroi, he had touched earth, and at the head of charges he had had breathed into him that vast spirit of an army which magnifies every sense in man. If Robespierre had been his attachment, yet he was less of an idol to him than to the crowd; what he came to defend that day was His Republic, and in the defence of it he was even willing to depose his friend a little, by a step or two, from the throne.

This young man stood at the foot of the tribune as the minutes were read and the correspondence opened. When the formalities were over he turned to Collot d'Herbois in the chair and claimed to open the debate. Collot d'Herbois, his enemy and his antagonist of the night before, caught no other voice, and St. Just stood at the desk and spread before him the report which he had prepared during the last session of the committee.

The high, glazed roof, which alone gave light to the

Theatre of the Tuileries, and which emphasised the portent of the Convention with gloom, showed his long hair and straight figure conspicuous in the centre of the rings of hearers. So, his head haloed, his mouth and lower face in darkness, he pitched his clear voice to that level of reason and pleading which he had determined to be necessary for the occasion; he abandoned gesture, and in his first words struck the tone of argument and debate. Had the whole of his defence been heard as we can read it now, balanced, careful, appealing to all that the Convention most valued and ready for every suggestion, his cause would certainly have won. For that document has nothing in it which the Republic did not desire. Even to-day there appears in it just the remedy for the block into which things had jostled. He would have consolidated the great Committee (whose divisions were the prime source of the whole evil) by making at least six signatures necessary to every act. Six would leave him and his friend and Couthon still powerless if the Committee were against them. He would have restrained the Terror, especially in the provinces. And the gist of all this labour, the wisest as it was the most ineffectual of his life, lay in a resolution by which the Convention should establish checks upon the arbitrary power of the executive.

I say, if this speech had been read fully, in the tone and with the spirit he brought to it, his cause would have been gained. He had not completed the first phrase, declaring his opposition to every faction, when the cry was heard which began the fall of Robespierre.

Tallien, from a little knot near the door, called out to him, "Tear down the veil!"

This man and his associates were neither secure nor able. It will be seen how, as the afternoon proceeded, they nearly blundered into failure, as they had all but blundered into it the day before. The mad inconsequence

of Fréron, the base over-cunning of Fouché, the vulgar melodrama of Tallien himself, were qualities ill fitted to conspirators. And yet in the end they blundered, not into failure, but upon the very object they had set before themselves, and the beginning of their success was this cry of Tallien's, which was meant to be nothing but an interruption, but which happened to cut short at its outset the careful speech that would have saved the life and but half diminished the influence of Robespierre.

The varied scene that followed can never be understood by those who would see in it a mere battle between opposing political principles. It was the result of so many separate forces, some of them nothing but individual panic or hatred, that it might almost have appeared a blind turmoil driven by fate one way, as a wind drives the innumerable confusion of cross-seas and eddies. But there was present there a certain interior current of opinion that accounted for the main direction, at least since it determined the final action of the majority, and it was upon the silent and obscure majority that the fortunes of this day depended. An appreciation of that interior current will explain the issue.

It sprang from two ill-connected but allied emotions: the reaction against the Terror; the fear of an attack on the Convention.

For the first, it will seem here, as thoughout the few weeks which were treated of in the last chapter, a strange thing that such a reaction should attach a special enmity to Robespierre. The more intimately one knows the man, the more closely one examines the details of his last actions, the more apparent does it become that he was now the principal opponent of the Terrorists. Had some miracle invested him at this moment with the supreme power, the executions he might have ordered would have been those of the executioners themselves; and perhaps, of all the definite and anxious groups opposed to him in Ther-

midor, none had a juster view or a more direct objective than that which sought to destroy him because he stood for the weakening of their awful engine of government. But his own scheming, the known opinion of his friends in the Commune, his public name had filled the air of Paris with a false idea. The name of Robespierre had taken the place of Providence, and had become the origin of all. If men "thou'ed" and "yea'ed," it was Robespierre. If they were bent and forced into an egalitarian model, it was Robespierre. And what was the supreme physical fact from which no one could escape? What stood like an obsession in the public mind? The stream of the condemned; a useless and disgusting survival, jarring in a noisome contrast against the summer light, against the new hopes of the nation, and the cheering for the victories. When the last forty-five, obscure, unmeriting death, had passed that day out of the Cour du Mai, when that convoy had forced through the unwilling crowd of the suburbs, through their murmurs, and (as some say)[1] their active force, then it was against Robespierre that the workmen called out loudly. In spite of himself the tumbrils were Robespierre. He had been proud to stand before Europe as the Revolution personified; the result of so hiding himself behind a symbol was that he had to stand also for the system which was now fallen to odium. An assembly cannot escape the atmosphere of the capital in which it meets. The law of Prairial had centered all the horror upon Paris, and the judgment of Paris ran in common, like a thing taken for granted, through the dumb mass of the Parliament. The provinces, in which his name had begun to stand for moderation, had no time to be heard.

The second element in the opinion of the Conven-

[1] Michelet is probably wrong, at least in his description of the military being used to restrain the populace. Hanriot cannot possibly have been there. He was lunching with friends a mile off, in the Rue St. Antoine.

tion, the fear of an armed attack, was perhaps the most powerful, as it was certainly the most tangible and obvious of the forces making against "the triumvirs." It is certain that some one had imprudently raised the cry of a 31st of May the night before at the Jacobins, and Couthon had there passed that wild resolution which expelled from the Club every member of the Convention that had voted against the printing of Robespierre's speech.

These two perils, the peril of the Terror and the peril of an attack on the Parliament, were enough in the tension of Thermidor to gather a coalition of defence.

But what a great run of acts had risen to make such a coalition certain and formidable! There had been no such "organisation of the thunderbolt" since that day, fourteen months before, when in the agony of the invasion and in the face of the blind obstinacy of the Gironde, Danton had permitted the 2nd of June. Hanriot was known to have sent out his orders; the sections were assembling. The gunners had already passed from two districts. Members coming in from the carrousel, had seen the pieces go rumbling by. Hanriot had been summoned by the committees, and had refused to come; that of itself was insurrection. Payan had come, but insolently; pitting the real power of Paris against their theory of authority, and they had let him go. That was an act of submission to the Commune. The Jacobins had organised their deputations to the Hotel de Ville. Duplay, the host, the friend, the adorer of Robespierre, had been seen in the midst of their deputations.

The night and the early morning had been full of arms, and even at that moment of midday the great crowd of the Convention waited in every rare interval of silence for a sound like doom, the Tocsin. The awful

bourdon of Notre Dame[1] that had twice before called up the cannon like younger brothers and filled the streets with united men, might at one moment or another send its distant hum into the deep pit where the Parliament stirred and dreaded. The Tocsin did not sound till night had fallen, and by that time their unanimity in action and the inertia of a Paris sick of blood and refusing to rise for a man, had saved the Convention.

But the mainspring of this opposition to the Commune, that was growing with every moment in the Tuileries, was not fear. If there were many Siéyès in the Convention, yet were there more Legendres. The solid sense of Cambon, the republican confidence of the Left Centre, the remaining and general enthusiasm for the work of the Revolution, armed these men with the determination that a faction, even if it had all the capital at its back, should not destroy the national representation. And they believed, what was perhaps the truth, that with the success of any attack upon their body, government would finally fall into the hands of one man.

So under the nausea that the Terror had caused, and under the fear of and indignation against the menace of the Commune, the opinion of the majority formed and grew. Robespierre, more than ever an emblem, was now in the eyes of the Parliament the figurehead of that terrible Commune, which—in spite of himself—was assuming his name and preparing revolt.

But the first phase of the struggle was confused. There was as yet no certitude that this formed and enlarging opinion would be put into action. Tallien's cry had provoked a violent applause; the applause proceeded only from his immediate followers. A second incident provoked a little the tendency to general action. St. Just might yet have continued when Billaud-Varennes,

[1] But the great bell never rang; by some fate it is silent unless the city really moves.

his face alive with passion, cried to Collot in the chair that he would speak on a point of order. It was a sight to see Collot (hissed, turned out, and stabbed at in the Jacobins the night before) give Billaud (hissed, turned out, and stabbed at with him) the right to raise a point of order. Billaud carried a great deal in his heart. St. Just had promised him an explanation—just as the Parliament met he had sent him a short note of refusal, saying, "I will open my soul to the Convention." He remembered that struggle in the dawn and was aflame.

Billaud then, fresh from the Committees that were coming into the hall with him as Tallien spoke, saw St. Just reluctantly leave the tribune, sprang into it himself and flung at the Assembly with violence the words that all had dreaded, and which, once launched, could not but drag the majority with him.

"What I have to speak of is a plot. There is a plot to destroy the Convention. I was at the Jacobins last night, and even there they tried to kill the members they had proscribed. I tell you the Convention is lost unless it acts at once. . . . There are men who will destroy you and who have said it in the club."

Then, with a sudden gesture he probed the nerve of the great audience before him in the crisis of its self-defence. He threw out a rigid arm towards the upper benches of the Left, to the Mountain in the shadow under the gallery, and cried: "There is one of them."

Thus was provoked the first combined movement of the day; the movement that gave the Convention a soul and a voice; that could only end in the loss of Robespierre. Great bodies rose to their feet till it seemed as if the whole hall were moving, and a mass of voices called out together at this nameless fellow, an obscure victim whom Billaud had marked out, "Arrest him!" The public galleries caught the spirit of defence that had

sprung from the representatives; up there the populace of Paris did what it had never yet done: it cheered the Convention against the Jacobins. The victories and the reaction had accomplished what Vergniaud's grave voice, Isnard's fervour, Desmoulins' pen, and even Danton's mastery had been unable to do: they had reconverted Paris to the dignity and integrity of the nation. The unknown Jacobin, the first victim of the sacrifice, disappeared. That honest man Lebas tried to put himself against the flood; it swept him away; he sat down under the ominous cry, "à l'Abbaye," and was silent till, within two hours, he gave up his life for the sake of honour.

The Convention was started and organised on its way. But if anything could have ruined the conspiracy it was surely the nature of the conspirators. For over an hour Billaud and Tallien monopolised the tribune, pouring out without reason words to unite their audience and words to divide it; without ability, given up to mere passion, they said things much more calculated to confuse than to drill the opposition which they had determined to organise against the triumvirs. Billaud exaggerated the yielding of Robespierre at the time of Danton's arrest into an active impediment: his mind, ill-acquainted with men, could not grasp the fundamental fact that in the eyes of whatever was most active in the Convention, all the attack on Robespierre, was the very resurrection of Danton. Two friends of the dead man prove it. Legendre, remembering Danton, was to do the decisive thing that night and to close the Jacobins. Thuriot, remembering Danton, was to shut Robespierre's mouth in the supreme hour.

As for Billaud, he stumbled on, falling over himself in his passion. He continued to attack Robespierre for putting a brake on the Terror, for saving La Valette—he did not see that the motive force of the engine before him depended upon a reaction against the Terror. Only

one thing preserved Billaud from an anti-climax—his intensity. That violence of his, spurred on by the memory of a night's insults, inflamed by lack of sleep, so far succeeded that it forbade the Convention to hear Robespierre, and that great loud cries of "Tyrant! Tyrant!" fell upon him from here and there when he attempted to rise. He, the master of so many debates, then judged the moment inopportune and bided his time.

The active movements, the arrests, began to appear. Tallien, nothing but a comedian, brandished a dagger "with which to die or kill a tyrant," and it is on record that the house saw nothing in the gesture but a piece of actor's foolery. But when he mentioned the name of Hanriot he touched earth again, and the Convention was very willing. Because of the danger, because of the guns gathering into the centre of Paris, they permitted this mime whom every man despised to move the first of the arrests that ended in the wiping out of the Jacobins and in the death of the extremists. Hanriot was declared a prisoner. Down that easy path of freedom the Convention went racing; in declaring the arrest of the head of the armed force of Paris, and that of his staff, the Parliament had taken sides at last. All that remained was to see if their policy could be pushed to the very end. They passed yet another vote. They declared themselves "to be in permanent session till the sword of the law had made the Revolution secure."

Still Robespierre and his were safe; so far not Robespierre but the Commune alone had been touched; it was but the early afternoon, and after the first furies, what with Tallien's absurdities and Billaud's random violence, a kind of weariness set in upon the Convention. In voting that Hanriot should be arrested, and that they, the Convention, should remain the only source of government, they had, as it were, clinched the first and most practical part of what had become their programme

of defence. It was not yet certain they would go further.

At this point in the vast struggle between absolute democracy and varied nature returning, there came an interlude, almost a repose. Barrère rose.

Barrère was a man whose character, though by no means complex, is so foreign to those who are attracted by the study of the past that he is not so much misjudged as turned into an impossible monster by the greater part of historians. To take but those who are in sympathy with the Reform; they are almost of necessity enamoured of stoicism, leaning always towards Vergniaud or Condorcet, worshipping what is strict and firm in principle. Barrère was empty of principle. He can be described in two words, he was a Gascon official.

He was a Gascon, therefore he was a brave, pliant, ambitious, careless, and somewhat impudent orator. He was an official, and therefore had most at heart the conservation of his own official position and of the organ of government for which he stood.

The mouthpiece of the committee, he knew that its unity was essential to the continuance of its power; the sometime associate of Danton in foreign policy, he knew how keenly the divisions within the government were watched by the allies. A go-between who had saved Billaud from St. Just and St. Just from Billaud during the long-drawn quarrel of the night, he had felt the weakness of either party.

At this moment of indecision it was Barrère that intervened, and there can be no doubt that he intervened to save Robespierre and the unity of the Committee. St. Just's report, had it been delivered, would have been of greater effect. But of the words actually spoken in that famous debate, those of Barrère's two speeches came nearest to saving the Republic from the

catastrophe that was perhaps the ultimate salvation of the country.

He spoke in such a spirit of compromise that had the most able advocate been retained for the mere purpose of saving lives the work could not have been better done. What the Convention had voted he left voted. Hanriot gone, he proposed to replace him by that refuge against personal power, a commission—a commission formed of the heads of the legions of the National Guards. The Convention feared Payan and Lescot; but they were Robespierre's men. To leave them untouched seemed like a retreat before the Commune; to condemn them, like an attack on Robespierre in person. Barrère solved the quarrel by suggesting that they should both be summoned and sworn in to protect the Parliament. Finally he argued the cause of the committee against Robespierre's vague accusations of the day before, not as one would combat a man attempting despotism, but as one would reason with a colleague open to conversion. And what is most remarkable in this effort of his is the fact that he did not so much as mention Robespierre's own name—the name of which all men's minds were full, and which when at last it was blurted out could open a battle on the issue of the sound alone.

So much for the great Committee. As though to increase the effect of a speech that was so calculated to succeed, and that so nearly succeeded, the old man Vadier, rising on the part of the lower committee, and meaning to reassume the attack against Robespierre, did but emphasise the apparent return to peace. His snuffling utterance, his self-repetitions, his heavy bearing, leaning forward on his hands against the rail of the tribune, his uncertain memory did but add a note of the ridiculous to what had been for more than ten trailing hours, and was to be again for a furious and decisive moment, a tragedy. The crowd of young men

whom this forgotten relic chose to address was moved to laughter. Flattered in some senile way by that laughter, Vadier approached the buffoon, left all mention of the more serious attack upon Robespierre, and disported himself in allusions to Catherine Théot and to the absurd pranks that had cast their ineffaceable ridicule over the public idolatry of her god.

Robespierre allowed the laughter that followed to rise unchallenged, and even constrained himself to smile. Impassionate but stretched to an acute attention, he may, for all his self-absorption, have noticed that something not far removed from good-humour—at his expense, indeed, but still good-humour — was coming over those whom he had dominated so long but whom in one or two lightning flashes of that terrible day he had seen as pitiless judges. When Vadier hobbled down the steps from the tribune, the failure of his doting, coming as it did after the ability of Barrère, had brought Robespierre very near to safety. It was the moment when he seemed at last secure, and when an observer would have said that the sharp strain of the last two days was to end after all in a slow relaxation: Robespierre less powerful; the committee less tyrannical and also less divided; the Convention more master of itself; the Commune become merely Paris; the Terror ending.

This was the point of relaxation which the debate had reached when the fortunes of the triumvirs appeared for one moment to revive. Have I made its vagaries seem confused and without direction? It is because the discussion itself passed through bewildering phases and preserved no logical order save, perhaps, the transition from violence to exhaustion. A living man who had seen it with his own eyes from the galleries would so have described it, and the strange paradox of that moment, when disaster seemed to be receding, would have led him to the conclusion I have named. But

falsely; no relaxation nor any solution of the crisis was possible save the fate that was coming. An orator might soothe the Assembly with suggestion or a dotard amuse it, but the Commune was still the Commune. Hanriot sat his horse still with a drawn sword for all their votes. It needed but a word to thrust their danger into their faces and to startle them into cohesion.

Robespierre himself pronounced the word. Tallien, vexed at the laughter that Vadier had provoked, and knowing how nearly allied are laughter and pity, came to the tribune yet again, crying angrily, "The discussion must be brought back to the point . . ." His sentence was not completed. Robespierre, who had once known the Convention better than any other man and who still thought he knew it in this transformation and revival, committed the imprudence that closed all free debate and let loose a storm. He stood up in his place without restraint, and with a gesture of anger to which the Convention was unfamiliar, in a voice that had abandoned its former control, he said suddenly, "I shall know well enough how to bring back the debate to order."

High as was his utterance, weak as he ever appeared on the rare occasions when his zeal or his dignity left him and when he fell to personal issues, yet there was in this sentence a fatal element. It revived the memories of the day before when men had looked at each other and had waited for the name of the proscribed. It was, for all the thin voice that uttered it, a menace; and it drew down upon the head of its author the clamour which it should have been his first business to conjure away. One by one the forces that denied him the right of defence, and that ended by destroying him, rose, now from this bench, now from that, in the solid mass of men before him; but principally in the centre and left centre this hint of his, a hint at tyranny, raised the loud murmur that grew to a drowning noise and overwhelmed him. It

was the same cry as that which had angered and provoked him an hour before, but now it devoured him. With every effort that he made to speak a monotonous and angry swarm of the same word, "Tyrant! Tyrant!" filled the air about him, confusing his thoughts and stinging him out of all control. He that had never there done anything yet but watch and mould his hearers, and deal with them, and choose his words, became like a man struggling with physical oppression.

A whirlwind sprang. Tallien spoke unheard. The bell rang and covered and confused the eddying of innumerable voices. This accusation and that, mixed up with the noise of the storm, rose and was lost again. A larger and simpler outcry outweighing every definite voice and every articulate reason, something blinder than man or men, the pack hunting, filled the deep hall with "Tyrant! Tyrant!" like a driving foam over seas at night.

Robespierre at that moment was utterly different from all that the older members of the Convention or his friends or France had known for five years. His pedantry dropped off him; hard sentences spoken from the soul, heedless of notes, left his eyes clear of the glasses that had veiled them even during his defence of twenty-four hours before. He did not rise into the tribune, but, stepping out from the bench where he had sat at random into the floor of the hall, he accepted with his eyes the thousand faces whose unity arose to blast him, and he was possessed for a moment of a freedom and energy that were hardly part of himself. He felt. The air was still full of the swarm of "Tyrant! Tyrant!" when he passed right in front of the President's chair, across the tribune and the secretaries, and, folding his arms, he looked straight up at the Mountain.

There was his home. He was a man of subtle temper, over-metaphysical, inclined to posture also: still, he had come out of that band of ardent men who founded

the Republic. There he had sat not two years before when the newly elected members for Paris and the pride of the Southern Blood had determined the new career of France. Among these old comrades some hand or some voice would be raised. What face looked out at him thence from the darkness beneath the galleries? Dubois Crancé, that had been a mousquetaire, that was all a noble and that had still a small smile playing about his large mouth. This soldier, cropped-haired, bronze-faced, strait-headed, looked down upon him and made no sound. Robespierre had denounced him once because he, a soldier, dared to give quarter in Lyons; he had recalled him from the west. And with Crancé you may read all the Mountain. Some in that party feared, some despised, some condemned the influence of a single man; but of all the soil whence he had sprung no one moved. Then, because he was hunted and alone, he turned himself round, still outwardly contained, but with the nervous quivering of his jaws working again, and saw the hundreds upon hundreds that went up in tiers and were the plain and the Right; royalists under him, silent men, men who "continued to live" in the Terror. He had never yet depended upon them; they had continually depended upon him. He begged—it was abject, but he was never a fighter—the alliance of those of whom he had once been protector; a mixture of violent cries, of hidden laughs, and of silence foiled him. He called them the "pure men"—that is, the men without politics, a just title—it raised no echo.

To a gulf of silence another wave of intolerable sound succeeded. He sought to dominate it by speech, but in the chair above him, whether distraught by the renewed anarchy or whether deliberate, Collot d'Herbois refused to listen but only called for order, ringing his great bell.

Then Robespierre, quite beside himself now and shouting epithets, turned upon him and called on him for a last time—called him a "Speaker of murderers," but even as he turned, the thing he found was no longer the expected enemy. It was not Collot d'Herbois that he saw above him presiding, but a young man from the valley of the Marne, a man who had come from the poplars and slow rivers, the Pouilleuse; from the place where you may see a long way off on the edges of the sky the great hill of Rheims and the vines, and the forest over all. Thuriot sat above him, and the memory of Danton ran through the hall. That young commander, a smile of the Champagne, had neither time to silence him nor to give him speech, when, as Robespierre exhausted by so violent an effort against a wall of men left an interval of silence, another man from the Marne—from the little Aube—another Danton again returning, the unknown Garnier, cried across the hall: "The blood of Danton chokes you."

Not knowing well what he said, confused by such different adversaries (he had within the hour been accused of defending Danton), Robespierre looked up a moment, cried out, "So, you reproach me with Danton . . ." and then by a movement unique in his life, he ran up the extreme gangway of the Left and faced the Convention. He had leaned more and more away from the pure Republic, more and more back to mysticism and tolerance and alliance with the creeds, but in this supreme moment he stood in the place belonging to the extreme stoics from whom he had drawn his first powers and to whose keeping after death his legend was to return. It was a thing mysterious and crammed with meaning that he who had eschewed all poignancy and all sudden force of gesture, whose very nature was opposed to immediate effects, now stretched out his hands in the attitude which is at once that of appeal

and of despair, and cried out, "Vote for my death." No one answered.

A certain Louchet, an obscure, just man, one that later stood out firmly for the Republic against the muddy flood of the reaction, called out clearly across the silence, "Arrest him!"

The cry determined not only his arrest—that was of course—but was also the cue for as signal an act of heroism and of devotion as our modern history records. Le Bas that had consistently loved him, and upon whose clear northern temper no suspicion of unreason can attach itself, rose in his place and said that if Robespierre was to die, he also demanded death. His friends near him caught his coat to pull him down. Out in the Rue St. Honoré an admirable woman was waiting for his return; a child, rather, and her child.[1] In a noble enthusiasm he threw everything away for honour. Then, shamed by so much virtue, Augustin, that had never done much good to himself nor much evil to the public, rose also, saying that what his brother suffered he would suffer. But if one triumvir, then three also of necessity and logic had to pass. Couthon, in spite of his lameness, St. Just, in spite of his contemptuous silence, suffered the vote. All these three, a little band that had dreamed vain things were put to the judgment of the Assembly; and when Thuriot asked for the Noes, so silent was the Mountain that he could write in the register that yet remains, "Unanimity." So, in a hubbub that declined into repose, the last scene of the Republic was acted.

Some one asked them to leave the Assembly and stand at the bar. They went and stood. Then another asked why no officers had them in custody. It was because the officers could not yet believe that this had

[1] Who lived to be Lebas the Hellenist, professor and friend of all the university, tutor to the third Napoleon, but yet a republican and a guide to younger republicans.

happened. When the order was given by the president, the ushers formally laid their hands upon the shoulders of the men that had imagined a new earth. There was nothing more to be done. A few vain remarks and platitudes, a sudden enthusiasm for the Republic which the Convention thought to have saved, the stampede of the public galleries, and the adjournment for two hours ended this memorable victory. It was not yet five of the afternoon; four hours had decided the battle.

When this first part of the work was accomplished the sky gave no relief; an unnatural evening ready for further evil brooded sultry and oppressive above the city.

In the minds of men also a strange mixture of close activity and of reluctance, things moving in silence, filled the remaining hours of daylight. This contrast proceeded from the spirit that lends all its irony to Thermidor. Paris was confused. To judge by the immediate readiness or fury of the Commune it might have been the great 10th of August, the rising for national existence; it might have been full peace to judge by the quiet certitude of the Convention. Each was deceived. The Parliament had no force to meet the populace had the populace armed; the municipal body had no populace to arm. The legal authority of the one, the moral leadership of the other, turned into a smoke of phrases; and, after most inconsequent adventures, the midnight struggle in which the drama ended was but the success of a few dozens over a handful of individuals.

Yet so tenacious was the tradition of the Revolution in the hearts of the politicians, so little did they see how the great victories had calmed political violence, that each group went on, in the air and dissociated from reality, thinking, the one that a city, the other that a nation was behind it. At the Hotel de Ville the full enthusiasm of '93 blazed out; the great words were

rediscovered and the sharp decisions upon which the Revolution had hitherto turned were taken. It was five o'clock when Herman's note,[1] official but very non-committal in its language and in the person of its bearer, came to the Commune. Fleuriot-Lescot received it and the insurrection the municipality had planned took shape immediately. The Council-General was summoned, Payan did what in a greater moment and for a national purpose Danton had done; he opened the doors to the general crowd; the crowd entered but was silent. With that kneading of direct action and passion which the Revolution had discovered, the Commune threw out decree after decree, each in the right order, each so framed that had there been a Paris to answer them, an organised army with its spirit and its plan would have arisen in two hours; but they worked in a void.

The barriers were to be shut, the tocsin rung, the drums were to beat the mobilisation, the cannons were summoned, the sections were to meet to remain in permanence and to arm; Hanriot was given his objective—the Convention; the Convention was "to be freed." But these gates, bells, drums, marches and attacks, were not machines whose levers the Commune held; they depended upon men for their agency or no bells would ring, no drums beat. The very theory of the Commune had dissolved cohesion in the solvent of liberty, and the fatigue of the great wars had drugged spontaneity to sleep. Such few citizens as gathered in the sections, debated on false issues; hesitated, dared not. The tocsin rang spasmodically here and there; ceased in St. German's, began too late in St. Antoine, was made a quarrel of in St. Roch. Only the thin bell of the Hotel de Ville itself swung continuously

[1] It was nothing but what he was bound to send; an official message of the arrest despatched to the municipality of Paris by the hand of a messenger. The mayor got it at five o'clock, about a quarter of an hour after the vote, so it must have been sent from the Tuileries.

in its dainty cupola, as though to show that only the federate band of the municipality felt that the moment was supreme or could maintain a purpose. As for the mother of the city, Notre Dame, it was silent.

To this torrent of active, empty decrees in the Hotel de Ville there was answered another torrent, paper also, in the great room of the Pavillon de Flore. The Convention was not without a head, the Committee of Public Safety lent itself to be the organ and authority of the law. The decrees fell like leaves; to swing the gates open, to ring no peal, to dissolve the sections, none to obey Hanriot, to arrest every man that rebelled. They signed and signed; they called the lower committee in to help them; what authority their names would give was poured out as though the great Committee had never hesitated, and as though the moment were indeed (as some historians have been misled into thinking it) the crisis of a long struggle and the end of a set plan. If they failed they were willing to risk the fate of failure. Carnot gave his name to half the documents, Barrerè to nearly all, Prieur to whatever was presented to him. In this decision to throw away the scabbard the Committee were acting as their enemy the Commune also desired to act; but with more thoroughness. For when young Payan had summoned the Council-General of the municipality in the Hotel de Ville there were hesitations: not all consented to sign the list of insurrection, and there was some attempt to destroy even such signatures as had been given.

What meaning could attach to these opposing battalions of words, these soundless batteries of official papers? This; the Commune was but half obeyed, but the Committee and the Convention seemed to be obeyed altogether. Every citizen that sat down to his meal, every gate left open, every bell left silent appeared a homage to the Parliament. Had they turned to positive decrees; had they ordered action, Paris would

not have moved much more for them than for the Hotel de Ville, but the negative commands of the Committee fell on a neutral Paris, and clothed their authors with an appearance of power. For if to a lethargic man one says, "Do this," another, "Do not do this," the second appears to be the master.

Meanwhile Paris dined. The Convention, while its Committee thus slaved, had adjourned till seven; it mingled with the life of the city, it dined with the rest.

And the five prisoners dined.

There are gaps in the story of Thermidor that are like the inconsequent accidents of a dream. There should have been a pomp and some great force holding these men — Robespierre, Lebas, Couthon, St. Just should have gone off the prisoners of a brigade—they went down the few steps to the rooms of the lower committee with no one but the ushers of the house to guard them. There, attended only by the sergeant's guard that was constantly posted and that had received no accession of strength, they very easily and soberly dined.

What came to rescue them and to affirm the insurrection? A great mob or the organisation of a battalion? Nothing of the kind. Hanriot, heavy with wine, started off with a couple of aides-de-camp and perhaps half-a-dozen friends. In the Rue St. Honoré Courtois called him names out of window. He passed on. Farther down the street he met a gentleman walking; he heard the gentleman mentioned as opposed to Robespierre; he had him sent off under a corporal and four men to the post of the Palais Royal.[1] He appeared at the rooms of the lower committee and argued with the guard; they opposed his opinions. He drew his sword as he stood in the doorway. A deputy of the committee got up on the table and ordered the guard to arrest him and his companions. They did so,

[1] An eye-witness told Gallois this.

and as he was a strong and violent man they bound him with cords.[1] Meanwhile Robespierre, not a little disturbed at a man's leaping on the table where he was dining, rose from his plate and napkin and interrupted his meal to advise Hanriot not to resist; saying he desired nothing more than a trial at the bar of the revolutionary tribunal. The others sat on at meat till the scuffle was over.

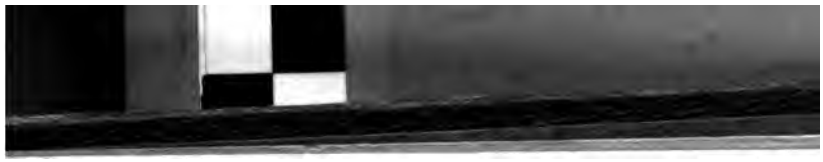
There is something terrible in this splash of grotesque: the handful that appeared on the great stage of a decisive hour, without audience, in such a small domestic way, and without any one circumstance of tragedy. The incongruity of such unaccented scenes determining so great an event was part of the spirit of Thermidor: it fell in with the silence and stillness of the air, with the steady grey sky, the even, growing heat, and the delay of the storm.

Some while yet before seven, their meal over, little detachments of the guard took each of the five separately to separate prisons. Lebas to La Force,[2] along the narrow streets eastwards, past the very doors of the Commune. St. Just to the old Scotch college on the hill of the university. It had been made a rough prison of for the time, and there, encased in lead, the brain of the last Stuart watched in the wall beside him. Robespierre was taken beyond to the Luxembourg: the two others to St. Lazare and to La Bourbe.

All this went easily and well. The note of that dinner table was continued. There was no rebellion or violence, nor even argument. Robespierre was confident of trial; the rest were either silent with pride (as was St. Just), or left their fate to the confidence of Robespierre (as

[1] The official report says: "The said sergeant being ordered to bind his hands and feet, this was accomplished with *great accuracy*."

[2] When Madame Lebas says in her "Memoirs," "The conciergerie," she must be thinking of the scene which I shall describe in a moment. Lebas was certainly taken first to La Force as the registers show. The jailers refusing to receive him he was led to the conciergerie.





did Lebas and Augustine). None marked their passage, no appeal was made; the astounding silence of Paris left an empty and wide road for their various passages.

Meanwhile the Commune, that had seized reality and was determined on a supreme effort, had all prepared, as it thought, to save the Republic in which it still passionately lived, and for which this man still stood.

The Commune had done much since the first insurrectionary call, though but two hours had been given them in which to act. They had raised the Jacobins; at seven, just as the prisoners reached their prisons, the remnant of the great club met to make a wing of the insurrection. I say "a remnant," yet it was still the Jacobins. A man could stand up in it and say he had voted against Robespierre and the momentary violence that followed such a declaration was succeeded by his recall and by an attempted apology. It sent a deputation to the Commune; it declared a permanent session.

The sections, the primary assemblies whose permanent officials and whose interested leaders were men drilled and chosen by what had been Robespierre's organisation, met also. The common citizens came in small numbers, and such as came were uncertain, leaning if anything towards the Convention. They passed neutral votes. They did not march. The night oppressed them, and the universal falling back into repose. Also the Commune with a strange audacity, being in reality a dead relic but thinking themselves all Paris, declared outlaws all those whom they called conspirators against the deputies. They forbade any man to follow the national authority, saying that till the nation and liberty were saved they alone ruled.

One part of the officials heard them—the jailers. At St. Lazare an excuse was found for refusing to receive Augustine; he was led away to La Force, and there two municipals in arms took him their willing prisoner for

the Commune, and brought him back to the Hotel de Ville rescued, the first of the five. So Lebas, refused at La Force and sent on to the Conciergerie on the Island, was freed. Just as he went off, a hired carriage driving up brought him his wife and her sister, who implored his return. He was tender to her and remembered the little child: he told her to wait till the morning. She went home, and he to the gathering crowd of the insurrection at the Hotel de Ville; but they did not meet again, for in the night this man, whose simple and republican mind compels me to admiration as I write his name, gave himself death.

While the Commune sent out its emissaries to the university to rescue St. Just, and to La Bourbe to rescue Couthon, Robespierre had thrown away the last of the cards fate offered him.

They had taken him first to the Luxembourg in a cab. He had gone up the hill of old quarter simply, hardly under a guard.[1] The wide Rue Tournon received the closed carriage in which he drove, and he reached the palace. The porter replied as the porter of every prison had replied that evening, but he, not from a premonition but from an insistent legality, demanded admission. The Convention had arrested him; he would obey it. He desired to stand his trial. Of all this the porter knew nothing, and, half tempted by an apparent safety, he permitted his companions (for they were hardly his enemies) to drive him down the hill again —they scarcely knew whither.

Since all the jailers in the capital showed this same temper, Charnier perhaps, or the gendarme with him, bethought him of a guard-room. The armed force, the sections, were at least doubtful or perhaps loyal to the Parliament, and he was half sick of his mission. The nearest guard-room was that of the Mairie on the Island,

[1] There were with him only Charnier and one gendarme.

through the oldest and darkest streets of the university; therefore he drove his charge down to the river, and across the Pont-Neuf to the Goldsmith's Quay. They left him there less under arrest than among neutrals.

It was still light, more or less, in the street without; the Place de Grève beyond the law courts, across the Seine, was filling with men; the lamps that swung over the narrow streets were being lowered for lighting. The clear noise that comes up from a French town on long summer evenings was the chorus of that little scene.

The militia guard of the Island would neither fight for Robespierre nor detain him. They had paid little heed to the Commune; they had understood little of the Convention. They found Robespierre among them, and were somewhat embarrassed. He sat, still powdered, careful and restrained at the rough table which a dozen dirty uniforms, the drippings of one oil-lamp, and the growing darkness infected with squalor. Here was the famous name they had heard of so often—perhaps the Republic in person; they were not over sure. They would neither fight for him nor detain him.

Had he remained there steadfast to his first determination, sleeping that night on the planks of the guard-room and demanding his trial next day at the bar of the revolutionary tribunal, he might have left the Island safe to return to freedom; lessened indeed, part only of government, but still alive—he and his theory alive. The river was his bulwark; the great law courts, in whose vaults he sat half a prisoner, were his refuge. He guessed it, but there ran in him that fatal flaw of visionaries, by which in easy times they lose their wealth and in times of tumult their lives; he could not judge upon or mould the things under his hand, but continued to live in the things beyond the world. A sharp accident persuaded him against himself.

Hanriot, released at last, had sought Robespierre at the Luxembourg, and had returned without him. The Commune had again sent out to discover him. There appeared in the doorless arch of his refuge some few figures of the Hotel de Ville. They had come for him and had found him there, almost the last of the Five. He refused to follow them and to step outside the law. The darkness grew. They returned. He suffered himself to be led on by their ardour and their active habit; he came out into the dying light and no hand stopped him nor was any bayonet crossed. He passed through the labyrinth of tall houses, before the porch, where, as a boy, he had remembered the chapter of the cathedral and his cousin the priest that had loved him; over the old bridge of Notre Dame where the river was still broad silver, and came out upon the Place de Grève with his companions, who rejoiced as at a kind of triumph.

Indistinguishable in the heavy darkness a crowd there disputed and eddied. There was a little faint acclamation: he did not heed it. They hurried him through the uncertain hundreds towards the high and delicate façade that showed blacker against the eastward arch of the night, and under the lowering sky of a returning storm. It seemed a creature ready for prey. Its tall, great windows were all lit and menaced the west like eyes; its soul of insurrection moved in it as though with a voice and an intelligence it could drive Paris against the nation and hurl the Convention from the sombre palace that stood up a mile away, a fortress against the last bars of daylight. That living beast was the Commune. It swallowed him up.

The great hall that he entered upon the first floor was filled with men[1] and ablaze with candles. Save Couthon all the rescued had arrived: like Hanriot, bound early in the evening by half-a-dozen enemies and

[1] Ninety-seven signed the roll, but there were many more present.

easily cut loose later by a handful of friends. They were surrounded by the Commune vigorous and creating vigour: without, an increasing crowd seemed to support them, and the Commune still gathered. One would have said in this first hour of the night that the Revolt was on the march and already victorious. But with Robespierre himself, their standard of whom they knew so little, there had come in upon them the paralysis that arises from thought. The organisation ceased, the orders failed, his signature was wanting and remained wanting.

There is not in the whole five years a moment in which the man appears more nakedly than in this night which was his last. His unalterable principle, his failure in the face of things, his fixed purpose in morals, his final irresolution in action are the master-keys that read him. For four hours he stopped the advance of time with debate, disputing the strict right of insurrection, doubting it, demanding persuasion. In the heat of despair, of violent appeals, and almost of commands to their own king, time raced by these men for whom time was everything; the hours went furiously on, uselessly, like an unharnessed river.

But in the Convention that same tide of time flowing was harnessed and ground out action in a great mill till every pulse of it produced a decision and completed a force.

They outlawed the municipality, Hanriot, at last the five members themselves. Legendre found wisdom in the stress, went with a knot of guards and shut the Jacobins where active Vivier was still in the chair; arrested him. The Convention named leaders for an armed force. They sent throughout the dark streets and to each of the ill-attended, yawning sections a decree to rouse and decide them; they caused to be read at the crossways and shouted by criers their terrible "*Hors la Loi!*" which has been like the bell of the plague

throughout French history and which Buonaparte alone survived.

The men in the Hotel de Ville heard it. At the extreme corner of the Grève where the old Rue de la Vannerie then came in, the outposts of the Convention had lit torches and were trumpeting it out on the stroke of twelve to the mob in the square: conquering their irresolution; deciding them. The tocsin had ceased. There was a silence in the great room among the rebels to hear the criers; some one ran out and seized them, but it was too late, the crowd was shaken, no gun-crew was formed. Then as though to mark the silence and to proclaim doom the tenuous chimes of midnight tinkled from the clocks of the Boucherie, of the Cathedral, and of St. Jean; the 9th Thermidor had ended and the 10th rolled in the end.

The air had been very still in the unnatural heat of the night, but the first breezes before rain stirred with the turn of morning, and upon the silence which nothing had yet disturbed, save the subdued debate of the crowd, the occasional rallying cry of Hanriot from the windows or the sudden shout of the "*Hors la Loi*," thunder broke. Revealed in sharp flashes, driven by the terror of the storm, the doubters poured off home under the sheets of rain. Some hauled away their pieces, some abandoned them, until in the second hour of the morning, when the thunder had rolled off along the river-plain and the rain withdrawn had refreshed the city with a new air, there remained but a group here and there gazing to no purpose at the windows, and the half-deserted guns: twin shadows, men and cannon reflected in the pools of the pavement.

Within, the wiser men had already despaired; but the more determined still wrestled with the man in whose quarrel, as they thought, they had challenged death. The wiser called for arms and had them piled upon the

table of the inner room; the more determined summoned Robespierre for the last time. He sat at the centre of the great baize table, enthroned, as it were, having on his left the mayor, on his right Payan, and before him the document all signed by his defenders and awaiting his name; the last arm of the defence at bay.

For the appeal to the sections had failed, the messengers had returned to report only confusion, and the Commune bethought them of one section at least to which the mere name of Robespierre should be a shaft of leadership. The grave relic of Mansard which we call the Place Vendôme and in which the bronze pillar of Napoleon recalls at once in its majesty the embodiment of the Revolution in arms and in the marks of its fall the modern parody of insurrection, was a section under the name of "the Pikes." Therein Robespierre had lived and to this the last appeal was made. It was written out by Lerebours who alone survived of all that company; Payan, Louvet, Legrand had put their names to it—they laid it before Robespierre. He held the pen doubtfully and would not sign. A final urging disturbed him but failed to startle him into action. It proceeded from Couthon.

The cripple with large painful eyes came to him, like a reminiscence of his past four months of power; a man upon whose fevered debility far more than upon the creative angers of St. Just Robespierre had been able to impress the sanctity of his system.

Couthon then, just released from prison, came in on the arms of two gensdarmes. It was past one o'clock; the columns of the Convention were on the road to the assault, there was not an hour left in which to decide. When Robespierre had thanked the men that supported his friend, and while his mind was yet moved by the reunion of the proscribed, Couthon added his plea to all that St. Just had said more passionately and to the hard phrases of Le Bas.

For half-an-hour or more he bore the scene, the crowd of men standing and crying against his principle; then slowly, with the half irresolution which had undermined him throughout that night he traced the first letters of his name. He saw forming, in this abandonment of all himself, the first signature that ever he had put to rebellion; an insult to his single dogma and a denial of the general will; he dared not achieve the sacrilege. With that beginning he ended; he refused to complete the signature, and putting down the pen, he laid his head on his left hand and stared at the paper before him. The clock on the façade struck two.

The scene was over. Whether he had signed or no, nothing would have come of it save an abdication of the close consistency of his life. Time, which he had refused to consider, now overwhelmed him. Already the two slow mobs that the Convention had gathered were converging on the Place de Grève; Barras from the Quays, Leonard Bourdon from the markets had met and joined their forces in front of the Hotel de Ville. No cannon opposed them. If Hanriot ran out to rally a dozen gunners it led to nothing but his own rough handling; he broke away covered with wounds, ran through the archway and hid in the inner yard of the Town Hall. The last remaining cannon of the defence were mingled with those of the assailants and turned against the building. Leonard Bourdon and his following crowded up the great central staircase and the Commune had fallen.

From the windows of the main hall on the first floor Le Bas had seen the troops of the Convention fill the square. He walked into the small room adjoining, took a loaded pistol, shot himself and fell dead. With the first light his enemies took him out and buried this soldierly, unlaughing man side by side with Rabelais in the damp narrow yard of the St. Paul. The shot began what was for some a panic, for the rest a stupefaction.

Augustine, never worthy or decided, leapt out upon the cornice of the façade, stood for a moment above the crowd and then dashed himself down upon the steps of the great porch. They picked him up yet living and carried him into the lodge. Lescot stood suddenly up and made a movement as though to defend his leader, but he had done no more than rise when the end came.

For as Robespierre still sat motionless, his elbow on the arm of his chair, his face turned downward and a little away from the door, a boy of nineteen ran up the stair before the rest and stood in the entry. It was Merda. Leonard Bourdon followed close behind; but before a sign or an order could be given Merda had raised his pistol and fired.[1] Struck full in the face, his jaw shattered and his blood breaking over the document before him Robespierre fell down; St. Just that had stood by all the while, receiving the inevitable with great dignity and silence, knelt on one knee beside him and tried to staunch the wound. Then in a scene whose details have remained to us but whose impression is but a huge confusion, the conquerors poured in and occupied the room with numbers.

---

To this, which was the true end of his life, little should be added. The long hours that remained to him were but a confused lethargy; dull pain, the loss of blood, long fasting, lack of sleep drained his life dry before the guillotine could claim it.

They took him on a stretcher to the Tuileries where all the prisoners were gathered, and, in the room of the Pavillon Marsan where he had supped the night before they laid him upon the table, giving him for a pillow a deal box, and some one handed him a pistol-case

[1] See Note II. at the end of this book.

of cloth with which from time to time he feebly tried to wipe the blood from his face.

When the sun had already risen they sent doctors to him, who, probing his mouth and taking from it his broken teeth, yet drew no sound from him nor any gesture. Only his eyes, which remained bright, were fixed upon them all the while like those of an animal wounded. They bound his jaw with bandages and left him so, for chance visitors to stare at all the long morning; and St. Just sat by his side, his eyes red and swollen perhaps from weeping, certainly from vigil.

During those five interminable hours Robespierre neither moaned nor mumbled a broken word, but lay quite silent, though at rare intervals the guards jested about him and his wound and his coming fate. But to this silence there was one exception, for as he attempted to reach his garter, which cramped and numbed his leg, an assistant, kinder than the rest, stepped forward and loosened it for him. Then Robespierre whispered indistinctly with his swollen lips, "Thank you, sir."[1] Equality was dying.

It was long before noon when the prisoners were taken away to the conciergerie; formalities of a certain length, the reunion of the other outlaws, the identification of each consumed the day, and it was not till past five of the summer afternoon that the tumbrils rolled out of the great gates of wrought iron.

A long and useless agony marked the road to the guillotine. So slowly went the carts, and with such frequent shocks and stoppages from the dense crowd, that the bare two miles of road took up nearly as many hours. On the Quai des Lunettes, where his familiar custom had half-endeared him to the stalls, the opticians and their workers saw him go by, and raised no cries. In the Rue St. Denis, the Rue de la Ferronerie, past the

[1] This man told it to Petiet, who told it to Michelet.

Markets, crowded windows and the reappearance of a luxurious world proclaimed the reaction; but especially in the Rue St. Honoré all that society which, since the victories, was reconquering France, made a parade of enthusiasm—and the people echoed it.

They say that at the western end the soldiers who had lined the whole way could not restrain the flood of the mob; the house fronts were filled; there were flowers and ceaseless acclamations. To one the Terror, to another unclean equality, to another madness, to another the Republic, to yet another the threat of punishment seemed to be passing in the tumbril. But as a fact it was only Robespierre.

He hung limp and exsanguine from the cords that bound him to the cart; hatless, his stock lost, his light-blue coat dimmed with the accumulations of the night and the dust of prisons, his white nankeen short-hose muddy and splashed with blood, his head loose at the neck; he looked like a man swooning.

It is not right to watch him thus, for the man had passed. I will not describe the end. Perhaps Carrier shouted behind the cart, perhaps they played some bacchanalian thing before the empty house of Duplay, perhaps a woman struck him in the Rue Royale. In the great square to which the guillotine had returned for this last sacrifice, the twenty-two were poured out in expiation, Robespierre the last. He gave, as they loosened his bandage, a loud cry of pain. The axe fell, and powder shook from his hair.

* * * * * *

Political effort in its supreme achievements or despairs creates a certain illusion. Matters of a moment pass for things eternal. A mere battle, a single crime, are thought, as they stand up against and terrify the eager mind, to have arrested in some manner the slow

purpose of God. So it was with this high combing of the revolutionary wave.

It was imagined at the death of this man that the West would abandon or attempt with an ever-diminishing energy the solution of that awful problem of political freedom whose complexity he had himself so little seized. A relief ran through the kings; the rich began to draw breath carelessly. It was thought that the Republic, which had certainly suffered madness, would leave no more effect than attaches to the memory of evil dreams.

Whatever instinct or demand had surged up from the blind depths and origins of mankind, that primal appetite had, it was thought, sunk back into its antique repose.

But it is not so lightly, nor in so immediate a fashion that change can be provoked in the development of a civilisation. The universal reaction which men awaited could find no stuff; the theories counter to democracy no new philosophy in the mere falling of a sharp steel. To-day through the wide perplexities of a world tenfold his own, the central thought, to which this man was registrar and whose propagation he imagined to be his mission, has reappeared to lead us through unknown dangers to unknown destinies; for we are certainly on the threshold of the Republic.

In closing this book, I turn again to himself. I remember his grave for a moment. His bones, buried in a vague field of the suburbs, forgotten beneath the dancing-floor of a common hall, were insulted for twenty years till they were disturbed by the pickaxe in the driving of a road for the rich, and no one knows where they lie.

I return also to the memory of the jejune, persistent mind which has haunted me throughout the description of his fortunes. I fear to have done him a wrong.

Such men may be greater within than their phrases or their vain acts display them. I know that he passed through a furnace of which our paltry time can re-imagine nothing, and I know that throughout this trial he affirmed—with monotonous inefficiency, but still affirmed—the fundamental truths which our decadence has neglected or despised, and is even in some dens beginning to deny.

He saw God Personal, the soul immortal, men of a kind with men, and he was in the company of those who began to free the world. God have mercy on his soul and on each of ours, who hope for better things.

# NOTES

## NOTE I

### ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE "MEMOIRS OF CHARLOTTE ROBESPIERRE"

THROUGHOUT the second chapter of this book I have used the "Memoirs of Charlotte Robespierre," and as their authenticity has been doubted, I would explain at some length how the doubt has arisen, and upon what grounds I have taken them to be genuine. It is a matter of great importance to such a study as this, because the character of Robespierre can only be read in the light of his boyhood and youth, and of that time we have no full record save that of his sister.

The history of the "Memoirs" is this. A young revolutionary of 1830 published after the death of Mademoiselle Robespierre (or "de Robespierre," as she preferred to be called) a book which did not purport to be entirely from her hand, but was his edition of the numerous notes which she had left for the use of history, and which, he said, had been handed to him by her executrix, Mdlle. Mathon.

The principal authority for regarding the "Memoirs" as spurious is a certain Croker, who was, in the earlier part of this century, an historian, and an ardent critic of, the Revolution. His fortune enabled him to make a very valuable collection of revolutionary pamphlets and material, the greater part of which is now in the British Museum; and so great was his reputation during his lifetime that he was offered some prodigious sum (I forget how many thousand pounds) by one of the principal publishing firms of this country (I forget which) to write a history of the Revolution.

By that process of copying which is the curse of history, his

opinion upon these "Memoirs" has been so often repeated as to acquire a certain fixity. Yet, if his original criticism be examined, it will be discovered that he had no better ground for it than political bias.

It would be an impertinence upon my part to attack the great authority of Mr. Morse-Stephens, who is without question the only Englishman thoroughly acquainted with the history of the Revolution, and whose admirable work, the product of an Oxford leisure, has received its reward in an American endowment; but Mr. Morse-Stephens will not, I think, deny that in this case he has merely followed the authority of Croker, for on reading Croker's MS. notes in the British Museum, I found upon the fly-leaf of the volume Mr. Morse-Stephens' name, and I presume that the book was once his property.

Now the argument in favour of accepting the authenticity of these "Memoirs" is simply the argument in favour of accepting the authenticity of any book that may be presented to you until some conclusive evidence of chicanery or forgery can be produced. If indeed the book had been published as proceeding entirely from Charlotte Robespierre's own hand, then one would have grave suspicions of the honesty of its publication, for she was not in the habit of long consecutive literary composition, and some parts of the style are evidently those of another hand; but since the book was not offered under any such guise, but frankly edited as the compilation and working together of her notes by another, there can be no question of false motive in the matter, and any one desiring to suggest that the relations given in them were not from her pen would have to prove one of three things—either, first, that Charlotte was of a character quite different from that which the author of these "Memoirs" betrays; or, secondly, that Laperronaye was so untrustworthy a man that anything proceeding from him was open to suspicion; or finally (and this would be the best proof of all), that in some one important part of the "Memoirs" a statement demonstrably untrue, and one which Charlotte and he must have known to be untrue, is made.

None of these three proofs against the authenticity of the "Memoirs" or against their veracity exists.

Charlotte's character is perfectly well known. She had many acquaintances throughout her long life, and the Lebas family (who

were her most intimate friends, and who occupied an honourable position in the society of the University as late as the third empire) have been able to give as clear and consecutive an account of her character in her age, as the private letters and memoirs of the Revolution give it of her youth. She was somewhat bitter and jealous; reserved; a little vain (there was even some talk of a courtship with Fouché!); strongly attached to her brother, and not particularly political. She could have no kind of motive in making him out this or that save the motive of domestic affection, which would, of course, prevent her from including the less favourable anecdotes that might attach to his youth, but which would not affect the neutral matter of which the "Memoirs" are principally composed. In a word, she was exactly the woman whom one would expect to leave the notes which she did leave; they contain not a few allusions to her quarrels with those whom she feared were acquiring too great a domestic influence over her brother, and in all of them she discovers herself to be precisely what the tradition of her character would make her.

Laperronaye's character is also well known; he was a young and enthusiastic radical, who more than once suffered at the hands of the Restoration for his political opinions. He was, as such enthusiasts must of their nature be, a simple man, and while his own relation of political events would almost certainly be exaggerated and biassed, such a cold forgery as Croker suggests (a forgery requiring, moreover, an intimate knowledge of human nature, a great self-restraint, and a vast reading) is utterly alien to such a type of mind.

As to the third method, the discovery in these "Memoirs" of a definite falsehood, I will treat of in a moment. Meanwhile let me examine the methods which Croker used in his analysis of the book.

He wrote an article in the *Quarterly Review*, a periodical at that time remarkable for its ability in attack, professing to review this with other memoirs that had been sent him by the editor, and he proceeds to the satisfaction of the middle class of his time, but certainly to the satisfaction of no historian, to demolish the authenticity of Charlotte's notes in the following fashion:—

In the first place he impugns the morality of the publisher.

He does not impugn it by saying this publisher upon such and such an occasion was guilty of such and such a trick, or wittingly foisted such and such a forgery upon the public, he simply says:—

"In England the assertion of any man of letters or of any respectable publisher that a work was printed from the MSS. of a person lately deceased, would never be questioned—we regret to repeat that it is quite the reverse in France."

It is difficult to see why Croker was at the pains of going further. If French publishers are notorious rogues, it is evident that any book proceeding from a French firm lies under grave suspicion, and the *onus probandi* in the matter of its genuineness lies upon the firm that has the temerity to issue the book. According to this theory it would be necessary for every French publisher to issue as a preface to all posthumous and most contemporary works a complete and exhaustive proof that in each particular case he had acted honestly.

But though this assertion of Croker's (had he seriously intended to propound it dogmatically), would have been sufficient for his whole argument, he has the grace to go into a little more detail, and attacks the honesty of Laperronaye. The basis of his distrust of Laperronaye is that Laperronaye was a radical, and was prosecuted by the Government for his political opinion. There is not a single atom of proof produced by Croker to show that Laperronaye was a dishonest man, saving the fact that he was a radical and that he suffered such prosecution. I will admit that I found it a trifle disconcerting to discover that some men regard as criminals all young liberals who live by lecturing and their pen. He does not say, "Laperronaye once forged this or that," nor does he even bring forward what is usually easy to bring forward in the case of violent politicians, examples of his exaggeration or misstatements; he simply says that Englishmen will always look with suspicion upon those who are prosecuted by monarchic or oligarchic governments for their political opinions. A postulate so puerile, and one so destructive to the credit of the whole English historical school, would seem incredible did not one know the kind of man who was writing and the kind of audience for which he wrote; nevertheless it is the only argument this astonishing man brings forward to destroy the value of Laperronaye's edition, so far as its author is concerned.

I turn now to the more serious part of his argument: the part in which he attempts to prove special points in order to establish his view. I give them in their order, and I think my readers will admit that they are not particularly convincing.

First he says that Laperronaye could not have had the "Memoirs" because Mdlle. de Robespierre's whole property was left in her will to her host and friend Mdlle. Mathon. The absurdity of this should be evident on the face of it. People bequeath their literary property every day to those who will have to call in aid for its editing and publication. But it becomes still more absurd when one knows, what Croker apparently did not, but what at that time many living men could have told him, that Laperronaye was an intimate friend of the house, that he was in continual conference with Mdlle. de Robespierre, and that Mdlle. Mathon made no protest against the appearance of the book.

Secondly, he complains that the style is in many parts "continually smelling of the three great days" of 1830, "no more like what a poor old recluse would have hammered out than it is to Marot or Rabelais." This is rank nonsense. If he is alluding to the phrases that proceeded from Laperronaye's own pen, of course they smell of 1830, just as this book which I have written smells, or at least I hope it smells, of the year 1901. But if he is alluding to the phrases which are supposed to proceed from Mdlle. de Robespierre herself and to form parts of her notes, I can only say that it is utterly unfounded. It is not very easy to distinguish the slight differences of style that arise in the lifetime of one person. Mdlle. de Robespierre may have kept strictly in her old age to the phrases of 1793, or she may have, as most people do, altered a little with the time; but the simple words in which her brother's youth is noted down belong to no particular kind of modern French style. They are perfectly straightforward and plain. There is not an expert in the world that could decide from the words or their order at what time between 1760 and 1840 they may have been written.

Thirdly, he says that her age (she was over seventy) "was rather late to set about writing memoirs." This again is nonsense. I repeat, the book does not profess to be of Mdlle. Robespierre's own composition; it professes only to be an editing and putting together of a mass of notes which she had jotted

down in the course of a great number of years, and Croker's contention that the mention of Levasseur's "Memoirs" (a book that only appeared in 1829) proves the book a forgery, has not the least weight, since there is no reason that a woman over sixty should not take note of the literature of her time. If some elderly English lady were now leaving a number of notes of, let us say, the Indian Mutiny (which is further from us than the Revolution was from 1829), it is ridiculous to imagine that she would be incapable of noting some important book upon the subject which had appeared this year, and which seemed to her to be libellous or false in connection with the character of some actor in that episode whose reputation she had at heart.

Fourthly, he makes great case of Robespierre's being spoken of as belonging to two successive parliaments, and calls this "a slip of Laperronaye's youthful memory." This again is absolutely puerile. Whether the inaccurate phrase is Laperronaye's or Mdlle. de Robespierre's is immaterial, it is just such an error as would never appear in a forgery, and as would appear in rough authentic notes jotted down from memory. Every child in a French school knows that Robespierre was not a member of the second, but only of the first and third parliaments of the Revolution; Mdlle. de Robespierre knew it, and Laperronaye knew it as well as Croker (for instance) would know that the short peace of Amiens interrupted the Great War, of which one nevertheless talks and writes as a continuous struggle of twenty-two years.

It is evident that upon such arguments as the above one could prove any authority in the world to be doubtful, but there is in the whole of this long article just one clear bit of evidence, and only one, and as might be expected it goes against Croker's contention. He speaks of the letter upon p. 126 (of the 18th of Messidor of the year II.) as obviously false from the terms of recrimination in which it is written; it is an angry and almost passionate complaint against the way she is neglected. Croker asks whether it is possible to believe that such a letter would have been sent to Maximilian, "who was her brother's master and hers."

It was published by Courtois (when that enemy officially edited the papers seized in Robespierre's house) as being addressed to Maximilian. On the face of it, it is improbable that Charlotte would have addressed such a letter to Maximilian, and Croker

should have known that Courtois very often omitted matter in order to turn the collection against Robespierre. He cannot be called a serious critic who accepts without verification anything which may tend to support his one theory, yet this is just what Croker did. If Croker had looked up the original in the archives he would have found that the letter was not written to Maximilian but to Augustine; it is *he*, her younger brother, whom Charlotte is reproaching for not visiting her on his return from the South, and we know that she had a standing quarrel with him which Robespierre was always trying to settle.

I think I have sufficiently shown that Croker is utterly unreliable, and as it is principally upon Croker's authority that doubts have been cast upon these "Memoirs" I think it will also be admitted that, until something more definite can be brought against them, the "Memoirs" must be taken as our principal source of information upon Robespierre's childhood and youth. I cannot refrain, however, from concluding by quoting a characteristic pencil note which Croker has himself added in the spirit of an *exegi monumentum* on the margin of his precious essay:—

"*It is now admitted*," he writes, "*that the* Quarterly Review *was right, and that these 'Memoirs' were a gross fabrication, but if it had not been for this exposure they might still have passed for authentic.*"

There, in a nutshell, is the spirit which always runs through this kind of falsification of history. A writer, popular for some momentary reason, develops a long process of reasoning upon certain postulates which he affirms with commendable vigour, but which he does not himself take the trouble to prove. B, C, and D, eminent and reliable men who have heard that A is an authority, and who are writing upon some cognate subject, come across this point; they have no time to look up the whole of the authorities; they turn to an index and they discover that the only man who has treated of it is A. They run rapidly through his conclusions and admit them into their own narratives. Their work, since it is valuable upon any matter which they have examined, is read by the general public; the single point so quoted is accepted with the rest, and at last the false conclusion arrived at by one charlatan in this one matter is perpetuated on the well-founded authority of a dozen honest man with whose labours it is intermixed.

## NOTE II

### ON CERTAIN SITES MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK

THERE will perhaps be among my readers a certain number who are familiar with modern Paris, and I take it that they will find some interest in the discovery of the exact sites mentioned in this book. The original buildings have nearly all disappeared; their emplacements, however, are worth tracing.

*The Jacobins.* — The Dominican Convent of the Rue St. Honoré, in whose chapter or refectory the club originally met, in whose library they held their sessions until May '91, and in whose chapel they sat for the remaining three years of their activity, stood exactly where the covered market called "The Marché St. Honoré" stands now. Indeed, that market was created by the Convention in a decree purposely designed to obliterate the memory of the famous hall. The entrance to the club, three arches surmounted by statues of St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Sienna, was almost yard for yard in that part of the northern side of the Rue St. Honoré where the "Rue du Marché St. Honoré" now comes into it. Of the original buildings nothing remains.

*Duplay's House.*—This house stood upon the site of the modern No. 398 of the Rue St. Honoré. It is on the northern side of that street, about a hundred yards before you get to the Rue Royale, and just before the opening of the Rue St. Florentin. The house may be recognised, apart from the number, as that on either side of whose central doorway stand a jeweller's shop and a furniture shop. It is the property of M. Vaury, whose bakery is next door.

There has arisen upon the origin of the present building a discussion which once possessed a certain interest, but the solution of which is now so thoroughly arrived at that the quarrel may be almost neglected. It will suffice for this note if I say that without doubt not a particle of the original building remains, but, save that the front upon the street is a good deal deeper than it was originally, the plan of the house is much what it was in Robespierre's time.

This house was, during the Revolution, of comparatively slight construction; it was only two storeys high in front, and with a depth of one room. The back, at the end of a courtyard, was also only two storeys high; and the back and front were joined precisely as they are now by a wing on the western side—that is, on the left side of the courtyard as you come in under the gate; but there was no corresponding eastern wing opposite as there is now, there was only a blank wall. In the years 1811 and 1816 two successive reconstructions destroyed all the original walls, and there were even new foundations laid; it was determined to make the house much higher, and the walls of the original two storeys were, according to the architect's report, not nearly strong enough to bear the weight. They were pulled down, the present house was raised to its six storeys, and the eastern wing was added. The carpenter's shed that stood in the courtyard was at the same time taken away.

M. Sardou, who possesses a very valuable collection of revolutionary MSS. and documents, was under the impression that the house we now see is the original building. It is true that the actual space of Robespierre's room still exists surrounded by four walls, and that the place where the old window was is occupied by the present window overlooking the courtyard. It is the middle window on the left on the first floor; but the discussion as to whether the room is still in existence is a matter for metaphysicians rather than historians. When you have taken away the floor, the ceiling, and the four walls of a room, and in the new house you reproduce on much the same situation a new set of walls, floor, and ceiling, have you still got the original room? The discussion is a trifle scholastic.

*The House in the Rue Saintonge.*—This house, where Robespierre lived for two years before he became the guest of the Duplays, still exists, and bears the number 64. There is nothing about it very well worth remarking, and it is impossible to be quite certain which rooms he occupied.

*The Manège*, in which most of the time of the Constituent Assembly was spent, all that of the Legislative Assembly, and that of the Convention up to May 1793, has been destroyed by the construction of the Rue de Rivoli and the Rue Castiglione. Its site would lie mainly in the roadway, but would partly over-

lap the Bodega at the western corner, and to a much greater extent the row of shops at the eastern corner. There is a certain irony in the connection of such modern uses—a drinking bar for the foreign rich and a dressmaker for the foreign rich—with such a past. The principal approach to it was down a narrow lane called "Passage des Feuillants," which ran more or less in the centre of what is now the Rue Castiglione.

*The Hotel de Ville* was, of course, destroyed in the Internationalist and Collectivist revolt of 1871. The great central hall on the first floor occupies space for space very much the same site as the hall in which the principal meetings of the Commune were held, and in which Robespierre was arrested and wounded on the morning of the 10th Thermidor. The great square in front of it (once the Place de Grève, now the Place de l'Hotel de Ville) is much larger than it was in the time of the Revolution; it was then irregular, rather triangular than square in shape, and barely more than half its present size.

Finally, if such a detail can interest the curious, I may remark that the guillotine of Thermidor stood very near where the Obelisk is now in the Place de la Concorde, a few yards to the north and west of it. On the site of the Obelisk was the great statue of Liberty which David had designed.

## NOTE III

### ROBESPIERRE'S SUPPOSED ATTEMPT AT SUICIDE

It is not without interest to attempt to determine whether or no Robespierre attempted suicide on the morning of the 10th Thermidor in the Hotel de Ville. That pistol-shot was, as I have said in the text, practically the end of his life, for he lay but half living and bloodless for the remaining hours of the day until his execution in the evening. It is also of great interest from the point of view of an analysis of his character. So important has the question appeared to historians that one may almost know in what category a writer on the Revolution is to be placed by noting his treatment of the doubt upon Robespierre's wound.

M. Aulard has well said that there is no absolute certainty to be arrived at in the matter, and he himself, by far the greatest living authority on the Revolution, has refused to decide. Nevertheless when I remember that history, which can always make sure of moral tendencies, can never be absolutely sure of facts, and that the evidence it secures is by its nature of a kind that would not be admitted in a court of law, I think the question of Robespierre's supposed attempt at suicide can be solved with at least as much confidence as a dozen contemporary doubts upon which it has been agreed to accept a final decision.

I take it that Robespierre did not shoot himself, but that his wound was inflicted by Merda, shooting, as he says he did, from the door, and I think the following process of proof lends to that opinion a weight which no generalities upon Robespierre's character can possibly outweigh.

Here is a list of the documents which have decided opinion upon either side.

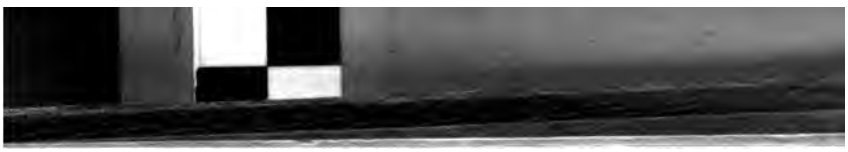
First and most important the report of the doctors sent by the Convention to examine the wound when Robespierre lay bleeding on the table in the Tuileries.

Secondly, the declaration of Dulac which asserts, a year later, that he saw Robespierre extended by the table before any one came in, before, that is, the troops of the Convention had thrust open the door.

Thirdly, Gallois distinctly states that Merda fired at Couthon and missed him, and that Robespierre had laid by his side before the irruption of the troops of the Convention, a pistol and its case brought in from the selection of arms in the adjoining room. It was with this pistol-case of soft leather, says Gallois, that Robespierre was wiping his wound during the long hours of his agony in the Tuileries.

Lastly, there is the declaration of Merda himself, made some little time afterwards, that he shot at Couthon and missed him, and that he then shot Robespierre, and with this declaration is a mass of the most evident nonsense, such as that he leapt at Robespierre with a great sword, and pointing it at his throat said, "There is a God."

There are one or two other declarations of less importance, but I omit them because they are either absolutely irreconcilable with the facts, or at third hand.





Now it is evident that our judgment reposes upon two very different kinds of evidence. First, we have the testimony of men more or less concerned to obtain favours from the victors or to defend the memory of the victims, and tending, therefore, to give a particular version of their own. Secondly, we have a quasi-scientific document into which there could be no object for introducing support of one theory or of the other. It is evident from the mere aspect of the doctors' report that it was written hurriedly, and from its terms that it purports to be nothing but a short, rather conventional and confused statement of the nature of the wound drawn up in technical language.

It so happens that nearly all the judgments upon that famous pistol-shot have been based upon the contradictory evidence of the first category, while the document, which, so far as I can see, is obviously more reliable, has been more or less neglected.

If one takes the personal evidence offered, one comes to some such tangle as this: the shot was said to have been fired by a hearty and irresponsible boy,[1] who had the greatest interest in making up the story. On the other hand, Bourdon, who was there, backed up his claim to a reward. He also claimed and got back his pistol from the Hotel de Ville where it had fallen. He was known to have held a pistol as he entered the door, and he fired at least at Couthon. He wove into his declaration the wildest gasconading, and instead of making it on the spot, he waited until the next day to appeal for a reward. Against this you have the testimony of a man far more reliable, an employé in the Town Hall, who a year later testifies that he saw Robespierre lying upon the floor before this boy and his armed companions entered the room. It is plain that on evidence like that no one can make up their mind either way, and the only result of it is that while the more romantic of historians have inclined to accept Merda's version, it is the more precise who have defended the theory of suicide.

This latter conclusion is, however, rendered untenable, I think,

[1] I hope this liar and hard fighter was of Gascon blood; but it is impossible to say so definitely, though he was certainly southern. He was born in 1774, joined the army after Thermidor, was promoted from the ranks and died from wounds received at the Beresina, 8th September 1812. He was colonel of the 1st Chasseurs at the time.

by the evidence of the doctors' report. We know that Robespierre had been sitting in a kind of silent despair for some time, with his left elbow upon the table, his forehead leaning upon his left hand, the right side of his face towards the great window, and the left side of it towards the door. Now we find from the doctors' report, though that report is rather confused (as Dr. Réclus has well pointed out), that the general direction of the wound was from the lower part of the left cheek near the nose downwards, shattering the lower left jaw and passing out apparently at the back of the neck, for no bullet was found in the wound. There was no mark of burning or of powder on the skin. The wound was small and clean, and there is no doubt that the bullet was considerably deflected by the bone. The reader has only to put his own right hand into the awkward position required to inflict such a wound upon himself—if indeed it be possible—to appreciate the extreme improbability of a man's turning a weapon against himself in such a contorted gesture; especially if this were done in a moment of excitement. If the shot was really fired by Merda, everything is explained. Coming from the whole length of a very large public office, it was more or less spent, and hence the deflection at the bone. The wound was small and clean, which it certainly would not have been coming from a weapon an inch or two from the face, and finally, that there should be no mark of burning or powder upon the skin, seems to me conclusive.

THE END

# INDEX


"A," names of Jacobins under, 194
Abbey of St. Waast, 42–43; gives scholarship to Robespierre, 51; de Rohan abbot of, 112; Robespierre revisits, 156
Academy, of Arras, 56–57; Carnot received in, Duc de Guines a guest of, 65; of Metz, Robespierre's prize from, 58; of Amiens, failure of Robespierre to obtain prize of, 59, 60
Actors, debate on, 99
Aix, Archbishop of, Robespierre replies to, 79; his protest on Civil Constitution, 115
Allemand, Royal regiment, desert, 185
Alliance, of Austria and Prussia, 168–169
Alsace, claims of feudal lords in, 174
Amar, mentioned, 258, 264
Amaury, Café, site of Breton club, 80
Americans, at bar of National Assembly, 109; resemblance of Isnard to, 161
*Ancien régime*, Robespierre typical of, 13; spirit of, 14; contrasts of, 21; literary influence in, 56; anti-Catholicism of, 112–113
Anglas, Boissy d', *see* "Boissy"
Antoinette, *see* "Marie"
Apostacy, of priests, 280–281
"Appeal to Artesian People," Robespierre's first pamphlet, 66–67
Arms, of Robespierre family 41, and *n.*
Arras, described, 43–44; academy of, 56–57; College d', 51; Robespierre returns to, 53; elections in, 67; Robespierre revisits, 156; anger of, against Roland, 217
"Artesian People," *see* "Appeal"
Artois, province of, described, 42–44; debate on taxes of, 100, 107
Artois, Comte d', emigrates, 84
Assembly, *see* "National," "Legislative"
Audebrand, senator, his anecdote of Mlle. Robespierre, 49 *n.*
August, 10th of, attack on palace, described, 188–192; general effect of, 193–195, 207; effect of, on Robespierre, 195–197; medal commemorating, 199
Augustine Robespierre, youngest of family, 49; scholarship at Louis le Grand, 53; his death, 363
Aulard, quoted, 80 *n.*, 192 *n.*; criticised, 96 *n.*
Austria, *see* "Emperor"
Avignon, massacres at, 154; Emperor demands restoration of, 174
Azéma, deputy for Aude, his description of 10th of August, 190–192

BAPTISM, of Robespierre, 46
Barbaroux, attacks Robespierre, 215; described, 234 *n.*

Barnave, draws up letter for Emperor, 169, and *n.*
Barrère, his early notes on Robespierre, 75; attitude on 9th Thermidor, 326; speeches on 10th Thermidor, 342, 343
Bastille, fall of, 83; Robespierre's comment on, 85
Beaumetz, Robespierre's quarrel with, 107, and *n.*
Besenval, case of, 90
Bercheny, the colours at, 185
Béthune, Robespierre visits, 157
Beurnonville, Minister of War, 235
Billaud-Varennes, Robespierre opposes, 245; threatens Danton, 286; attitude on 9th Thermidor, 327–328; his speech on 10th Thermidor, 338–342
Biron, defeat of, 185
Birth, of Robespierre, 39
Bishop, *see* under separate dioceses and names
Bishops, their protest against Civil Constitution, 122–124
Boissy d'Anglas, 323
Bonaparte, *see* "Napoleon"
"Bourdon," of Notre Dame, 338
Bourdon, Leonard, occupies Hotel de Ville on 10th Thermidor, 362
Boyhood, of Robespierre, 50–53
Breton club, 80, 81; origin of Jacobins, 97
Brézé, de, Mirabeau's reply to, 82
Briez, 264
Brissot, at Desmoulins' wedding, 124; his power in 1792, 115; person described, 166; quarrel with Robespierre, 168; forces war, 169; formation of Girondin ministry, 174–175, 181–183; principal debate against Robespierre, 213–214
Brittanique, Hotel, Rolands at, 212
Brittany, in the Revolution, 80
Buissart, Robespierre's letters to 76 *n.*, 82–84 *n.*
Buonarotti, 303

CABARRUS, Theresa, Robespierre's warrant of arrest of, 59, 310
Caen, Bishop of, *see* "Fauchet"
Cahiers, abstract quality of educated, 55
Camille des Moulins, *see* "Desmoulins"
Carnot, family of, 46–47; received in Academy of Arras, 57; briefs Robespierre, 63
Carrault, Robespierre's mother, 45
Carvin, settlement of Robespierre's family at, 40; they leave it for Arras, 42
Catholicism, Robespierre's attitude towards, 110; and history of France, 111–112; and the schism, 153–155
Cavaignac, family of, 47
Character of Robespierre, 12–18, 27–38
Charlotte Robespierre, 48, and *n.*; 49, and *n.*
Chaumette, at King's trial, 221–222
Church, Cambon proposed to disestablish, 224
Civil Constitution of clergy, 113–119; signed by King, 122
Clergy, *see* "Civil." Marriage of, Robespierre's attitude to, 117
College, of Arras, 51; of Louis le Grand, 51; Robespierre's life at, 52; King visits, 53
Committee of Public Safety, formed, 243–244; Robespierre enters, 256–257; requires continuation of Terror and drags in Robespierre, 293; Thermidor, 325–327
Commons, election of, at Arras, 67; their oath in the tennis court, 81;

entry of, into Revolution, 106; and Mirabeau, 129
Commune, of 10th of August, 197–199; Robespierre identified with, 208; of '94, no longer Parisian, 319, 324; insurrection of, 355 *et seq.*
Condé, question of, 119
Condorcet, his view of Robespierre, 219
Conspiracy, the, against Robespierre, 323
Constitution of 1791; its breakdown, 146
Contract, *see* "Social Contract"
Convention, first meeting of, 209
Conzié, de, bishop of Arras; his patronage of Robespierre, 50–51; gives Robespierre a magistracy
Cordeliers, club of, 289–290; *Vieux, see* "*Vieux Cordelier*"
*Courrier de Paris*, 219
Court party, their attempt at reaction in October 1789, 91
Cromwell, Lafayette compared to, 182
Crown, intrigues with the enemy, 149, 169; a power of, in early part of war, 178

DANTON, family of, 46; his flight to England, 144, and *n.*; his report from Belgium, 237; peril of in Dumouriez' treason, 242–243; returns to stop the Terror, 277–278; last interview with Robespierre, 292; death of, 296
Dauphin, Robespierre's supposed allusion to, 108, and *n.*
"De," *see* under separate names
Debates, on Civil Constitution, 114–119; on the war, 161–164; on Robespierre's ascendancy, 212–217; of 9th Thermidor, 332–349
Deity, Feast of, 309–310
Desmoulins, Camille, at College with Robespierre, 52; rouses Paris in July 1789, 83; marriage of, 123–124; attack on Brissot, 158; *Vieux Cordelier*, 278–286
Dillon, General, his defeat and death, 184–185
Dominicans, offer their convent to Radical club, 97
Dubois-Crancé, at siege of Lyons, 267; abandons Robespierre in Thermidor, 347
Dumouriez, described, 170–171; forces war, 174; first successes of, 212; his defeat at Neerwinden, 241; and treason, 242
Duplay, described, 143; Robespierre enters house of, 143–145; elected to his section, 202; Robespierre in house of, in '94, 300–304; his farewell to Robespierre, 330
Duplay, Eleanor, *see* "Eleanor"
Duplay, Nicholas, 320–321, and *n.*

EDICT, against refractory priests, 186
Education, of Robespierre, 50–54
Egalité, execution of, 261; patron of Brissot, 166
Eleanor Duplay, betrothed to Robespierre, 303; last walk with, 320
Elections, of Arras, 67; of Robespierre to Paris, 203–205
Elector, of Treves, 169
Emperor, supposed letter of, 169; war declared against, 174
English lady, addressed by Robespierre, 60
Ercherolles, Mlle. d', 267

FAMILY, of Robespierre, 40–48; probably Irish, 46

Families, of the Revolution, 46–47
Fanatics, nature of, 29–31
Father of Robespierre, *see* "Maximilian-Bartholomew"
Fauchet, Bishop, 157
Forné, Bishop, 157
Fouché, recalled from Lyons, 311; conspires, 316, 319
Fox, inn of, 70

"GALLICAN CHURCH" in possession of orders, 124
Girondins, first appearance, 156–157; Robespierre's antagonism to, 167; attack Robespierre, 181, 211, 217, &c.; main quarrel of, with Mountain, 204–207; their position in March 1793, 236–238; their fall, 250; saved by Robespierre, 265; their end, 268
Gorsas, 218
Guadet, 172, 182

HAMEL, preface, xiii; quoted, 60 *n.*, 121 *n.*, 202 *n.*, 219 *n.*
Handwriting, of Robespierre, 59, and *n.*
Hanriot, in 2nd of June, 249; in Thermidor, 337–341
Hapsburgs, 168
Helvetius, his bust broken, 226
Herbert, power of, 262; his anti-Christian movement, 279; his fall, 290
Hoche, 304–305, and *n.*
"*Hors la loi!*" 359–360
Hotel de Ville, in Thermidor, 350–363
House, of Duplay, *see* "Duplay"; of Robespierres, at Arras, 44

IENARD, 159–161

JACOBINS, origin of, 82, 96–98; Mirabeau's last speech, 125–127; scene at, on 17th of July 1791, 141; they applaud war, 161; great debate on war, 164–165; debate of Brissot and Robespierre in, 181–183; last speech of Robespierre at, and scene of 8th Thermidor, 321–322; closed by Legendre, 359
Jews, Robespierre defends, 99

KERALIO, Mademoiselle de, 57, also "Madame Robert," 143 *n.*

LAFAYETTE, attack on, in Jacobins, 132; and Champ de Mars, 140–141; attempts to save crown, 179; compared to Cromwell, 182; exile and end of, 188
Lally, Tollendal, and his son, 72, and *n.*
Lebas, attempts to save Robespierre, 340; sacrifices himself, 349; death, 360
Lebas, *fils*, 349
Lecointre, a fool, 328
Legendre, Danton's friend, shuts the Jacobins, 359
Legislative Assembly, character of, 147–153
Lepelletier de St. Fargeau, 89; his death, 328
Letters, of Robespierre, to Buissart, 77–79, 84; to Duplay, 156–157, "to my constituents"
Lightning-rod, case of the, 64
Louchet, decides moment of Robespierre's fall, 349
Louis XVI., visits Robespierre's college, 53; and Mirabeau, 127–130; flight of, 136–137; intrigues for foreign aid, 164; reads declaration of war, 174; a prisoner,

192; his trial and death, 220–232
Louis le Grand, College of, 51, 52
Loustalot, his absurdity, 117

MACHECOUL, origin of Vendean War, 240
Maillard, his appearance at Versailles, 91–93
Mairie, Robespierre handed to guard of, 356
Malesherbes, 231, and *n.*
Marat, author of the Massacres of September, 202; trial of, 247; death of, 260
Marie Antoinette, name of Robespierre's godmother, 46 *n.*
Marie Antoinette, Queen, writes, with Barnave, letter provoking war, 169; death of, 261
Marly, forest of, 14
Marriage, of Robespierre's parents, date of, 39; of Robespierre proposed, 65; again proposed with Mlle. Duplay, 303
Marseillaise, origin of, 177
Martin Robespierre, *see* "Robespierre"
Mass of Holy Ghost, opens Parliament, 74
Massacres, of September, 202–204; of Champs de Mars, 143–145
Maximilian, *see* "Robespierre"
Maximilian - Bartholomew, *see* "Robespierre"
Maury, Abbé, 112–113, and *n.*
Medal, *see* "August"
Merda, shoots Robespierre, 363
Mirabeau, voice of, 10; and de Brézé, 82; Robespierre opposes, 120–121; last struggle and death of, 124–128; bust of, broken, 226
Miranda, 240–241, and *n.*
Monasticism, 113, and *n.*
Monsieur, his reply to decree against emigrants, 159, and *n.*
"Mouchoir du Prédicateur," verse of Robespierre, 61
Mounier, on origin of Jacobins, 97, and *n.*
Mountain, quarrel of, with Gironde, 195; character of this quarrel, 205–209; approached by conspirators in Thermidor, 323; abandons Robespierre, 347
Mountjoie, on origin of Jacobins, 97, and *n.*

NAPOLEON, 284, 291
Narbonne, 165, 170
National Assembly, its general character, 69, &c.; origin of the term, 75, and *n.*
Neerwinden, defeat of Dumouries at, 240

OCTOBER, march on Versailles, 91–93
"Ophelia," Robespierre's verses to (probably English), 60
Orleans, *see* "Egalité"

PALACE, of Versailles, attack on, *see* "October"; of Tuileries, attack on, *see* "August 10th"
Paris, elections of, to Convention, 203–204; attitude of, during Thermidor, 350, 353, &c.
Pétion, 134, 137, 160, 258
Prairial, law of, 310
Priests, edict against refractory, 186
Protestants, Robespierre defends, 99; *see* also "Jews"

REFORMERS, general character of, 4–5

Rénauld, Cécile, 307–308
Revolution, generation of, 14–21; character of youth in, 37; nature of, 103–107
Robespierre, Robert de, 41; Yves de, 41; Martin de, 42; Maximilian (the elder), 42; Maximilian-Bartholomew, father of Robespierre, 45; his death, 49
Robespierre, person of, 6–11; character of, 13–18, 27–38; birth and descent of, 39–46; collateral descendants of, 48, and n.; at college, 51–52; practises at bar, 62–67; entry into States-General, 69–75; his first speech, 76–77; joins the Breton Club, 80–81; first acquaintance with power in October 1789, 92–93; effect of Jacobins on, 96–98; first general attack on him in Parliament, 100; quarrel of, with Beaumets, 107; growing popularity of, 108–109; St. Just first introduced to, 120; enters the household of Duplay, 140–145; character of his position during Legislative, 152–153; revisits native province, 156–157; opposes war and Brissot, 163, 181–183; is absorbed by Paris, 196, 198; elected to Paris, 204; causes of his opposition to rivals, 209; and of his later position, 210; great attack upon, 213–218; Condorcet's description of, 219; demands death of the King, 225; and votes for, 229; enters the Committee of Public Safety, 256–257; saves the, 73, 265–266; abandons the Moderates and Desmoulins, 283–286; last dinner with Danton, 292; abandons Danton, 295; his idolaters in Duplay's house, 300–303; in the Feast of the Deity, 308–309; his last speech, 321–322; last morning of, 330; fatal error of, on 10th Thermidor, 345; arrested, 349; joins the Revolt, 358; refuses insurrection, 362; is shot, 363; is guillotined, 365
Roland, Madame, 143, and n., 235
"Rosati," 60
Rosicrucians, lodge of, at Arras, 45
Rousseau, his theory, character, and effect of, 24–27
Roux, communist, 251 n.

St. Fargeau, *see* "Lepelletier"
St. Just, enters into Revolution, 120; his appeal to the Gironde in the King's trial, 228, and n.; enters Committee of Public Safety, 253; prepares Robespierre's entry thereto, 256; his report on the imprisoned Girondins, 258; notes received from Robespierre in report on Danton, 294; estranged from Robespierre, 293; during night of 8th Thermidor, 327–329; his attempt to save Robespierre on 9th Thermidor, 332–334; is arrested, 349
Social Contract, nature of theory of, 18–24; Rousseau's pamphlet on, 25–27

Tallien, his mistress arrested, 311; attacks Robespierre in Thermidor, 334
Temple, Robespierre deputed to guard, 203
Terror, Robespierre's reluctance to face, 256; Danton troubled at, 257; Robespierre admits, 270 *et seq.*
Théot, Catherine, 307
Therasson, proposes public meetings of the great Committee, 261 n.
Theresa, *see* "Cabarrus"

Thuriot, in Thermidor, 348, 349
Treves, *see* "Elector"

VADIER, in Thermidor, 343–344
Valenciennes, besieged, 248; fall of, 259; Briez and, 264
Vendée, rising of, 237, 240
Vendome, Place, "Place des Piques," 202, 361
Verdun, besieged, 203
Vergniaud, his speech at King's trial, 227; attitude in March '93, 239; death of, 268
Versailles, Robespierre enters, 69; ill suited to him, 71, 93–96
*Vieux Cordelier*, 277, 278, 283–285, 288
Vilate and Robespierre, 309
Virtues, of Robespierre, 34, &c.
Vivier, at Jacobins on 10th Thermidor, 359
Voice, of Robespierre, 10

WAAST, ST., *see* "Abbey"
War, declaration of great, against Austria, 174–175; against England and Holland, 234
Wattignies, 261
Wimpfen, his reply to the Convention, 258

YVES de Robespierre, 41